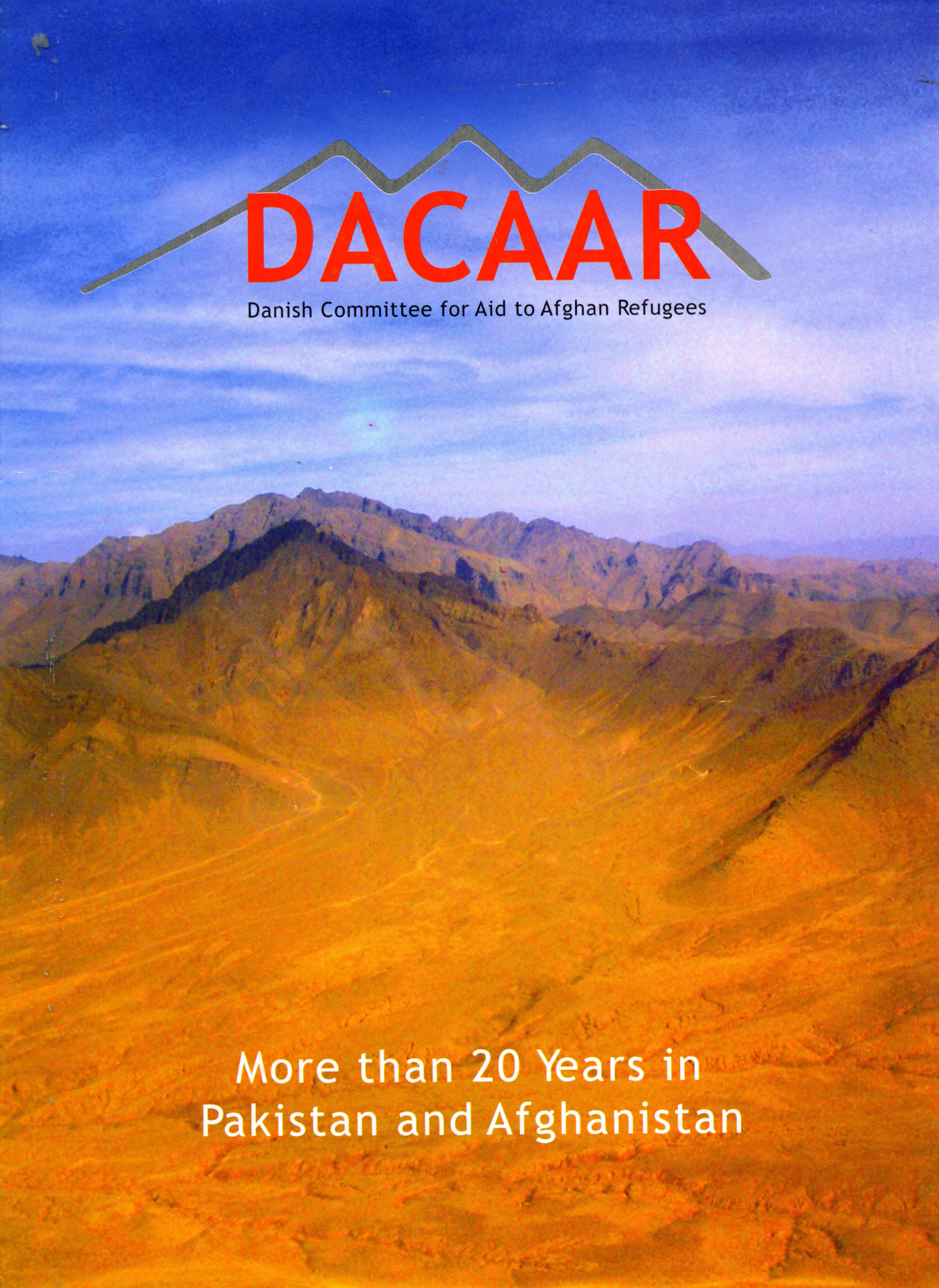
DACAAR

Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees



More than 20 Years in Pakistan and Afghanistan

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DACAAR: More than 20 Years in Pakistan and Afghanistan is the story of Danish aid and development in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan carried out by DACAAR (Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees) since 1984.

The idea to publish this book was developed during 2004, when DACAAR celebrated its 20th anniversary, and was finally compiled in the beginning of 2005.

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DACAAR: More than 20 Years in Pakistan and Afghanistan is published in a print version as well as on a cd-rom.

Preface

For those getting acquainted with Afghanistan, be it for at few days or several years, memories of extraordinary people, moments, faces, destinies are there for the rest of life. Afghanistan is a country of contrast. United in faith, however with a deep rooted ethnic diversity that often seems to mock the notion of one stable country. A country with a legendary old history, yet with one of the youngest populations in the world.

For those to whom the acquaintance with Afghanistan is taken further, Afghanistan for many becomes a lasting commitment. The authors who have contributed to this book are all characterised by their long-lasting interest in Afghanistan and their persistent commitment to the process of rehabilitation and development. A commitment to spend years and use experience and skills to contribute to anthropological research, rehabilitation and development in a country, which most of them got to know before war and fanatic Communist and Islamic leaders changed lives.

In 1984, millions of Afghans had fled the country as result of the Soviet occupation. Many of them lived in neighboring Pakistan waiting for better times and circumstances to allow them to return to their homes and their fatherland. This was when DACAAR (Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees) was established as an initiative to support Afghan refugees - at first in the growing camps in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, and since 1988 also inside Afghanistan.

Since the beginning of DACAAR activities, occupation, civil war and conflicts have torn apart Afghanistan and claimed thousands of victims, finally paving the way for the religious Taliban regime in the mid-90s. DACAAR throughout the years kept its commitment to assist Afghans - those who fled to Pakistan, and those who stayed behind.

After the terror attacks on 11 September 2001, the United States launched the 'Enduring Freedom' campaign focusing on Afghanistan in the war against terror. While this war is still ongoing, exhausted Afghans try to

survive and live through new chapters of continued hardships in what is one of the poorest and most devastated countries in the world. In spite of the international community's massive economical support and presence in Afghanistan, and small signs of progress, enduring freedom is still hard to believe in. Hard facts tell their own story: one in five children does not reach the age of five, the maternal mortality rate is 60 times higher than for women in industrial countries, around every third Afghan over the age of 15 can read and write, and the average life expectancy is about 43 years.

Today, many Afghans have returned, but millions are still waiting, living as refugees, born as refugees. Although civil war and the Taliban regime is now history, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a country with a constitution and an elected president, there is still a long way to lasting peace and stability.

This book tells the story of how a Danish initiative to support Afghan refugee women in Pakistan in 20 years grew to be a significant aid agency committed to help Afghans rebuild their country.

Alexandra Strand Holm
Kabul, March 2005

Chapter 1

Danish Afghanistan Relations



Photo: Moesgaard Museum

Danish Expeditions to Afghanistan

Klaus Ferdinand

The first words written in Danish about Afghanistan predate the establishment of the Durrani empire in 1747, and were by the playwright Ludvig Holberg in 1739. He praised the three Afghan rulers in Kandahar, Mir Wais, Mir Mahmud and Shah Ashraf, for representing a successful combination of cunning, daring and wisdom – in Holberg's views three qualities essential for establishing a new and lasting empire.[1]

Besides this early reference to Afghanistan, the history of Danish relations in Afghanistan began with the travels and investigations carried out by the explorer Henning Haslund-Christensen, who started the work in Afghanistan during the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia 1947–56.[2]

The inclusion of Afghanistan in the geographical scope of The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia formed part of an ambitious research project which would be linked with that of previous Danish studies in Iran, West Turkestan, Pamir and Mongolia.

Haslund-Christensen arrived in Kabul in December 1947 together with four members of the expedition, where he and Halfdan Siiger (religious historian) were covering ethnographic aspects. He immediately started collecting ethnographic artifacts in Kabul, such as household objects and utensils, toys and a precious collection of amulets. Haslund-Christensen also encouraged the natural scientists of the team to collect ethnographic artifacts



British Cemetery, Kabul

during their trips to various locations in the country. As a result the National Museum in Copenhagen today houses one of the large early Afghan collections outside the country itself, including a small collection of items from Pashtun nomads. Haslund-Christensen had planned to record folk music and carry out investigations among the semi-nomadic Aimaq and the settled Hazara of Central Afghanistan, but tragically he died in Kabul on 13 September 1948 before any of these plans materialised. He was buried in the Christian cemetery in Kabul next to the great Asian scholar, Sir Aurel Stein.

After the death of Haslund-Christensen, Lennart Edelberg, the botanist and geographer, and later high school teacher in Ribe, put particular effort into the collection of ethnographic artifacts primarily in Nuristan, the region in which he conducted most of his research, but also in the Kabul area, among the Aimaq, the Hazara and in other places. In 1948, Halfan Siiger went to the Chitral in north Pakistan and conducted a religious-historical study among the Kalash people and made a fine collection of artifacts. This work has been followed up in recent years by the Danish ethnographers Svend Castenfeldt and Mytte Fentz from Department of Ethnography and Social Anthropology, at Moesgaard, Aarhus University.

The Afghanistan research left uncompleted by Haslund-Christensen's untimely death in 1948 was followed up by the ethnographical 'Henning Haslund-Christensen Memorial Expedition 1953-55', where Lennart Edelberg continued his work in Nuristan (until 1954), with later follow-ups together with his wife Margot in 1964 and 1970. During these trips supplementary collections of artifacts from Nuristan were made for the Moesgaard Museum. In 1964, Edelberg also made a comprehensive collection from the Kabul area which became Moesgaard's first UNESCO collection of material artifacts for educational use in the Danish public schools. The collections from Nuristan and from the related Kalash people are very comprehensive and rank among the finest in the world from the Hindu Kush area.[1]

The study of Afghan nomadism formed an important part of the 'Memorial Expedition', which was led by Prince Peter (of Greece and Denmark). The members of the expedition was Lennart Edelberg, the cinematographer Peter Rasmussen, my wife and I, being a social anthropologist, with special responsibility to do nomad research. The mission's first work was carried out during a trip through Central Afghanistan, which included a visit to the nomad summer bazaars. The mission provided the very first documentation of this particular phenomenon and formed the start of a Danish tradition for nomad research in Afghanistan which has continued till today.

My studies of nomads were further developed during later trips to Afghanistan in 1960 and 1965-66. In 1960, the focal point was studies of Pashtun nomad trade with the resident Hazara and their caravan trading in

Central Afghanistan in general. This work resulted in the first detailed description and analysis of nomad trading activities and their social and economic context.

In 1975–76, Danish research in Afghanistan was resumed when I and 12 students of social anthropology conducted an excursion to Afghanistan collecting artifacts for a large Afghanistan exhibition at Moesgaard Museum, which later toured other Danish museums. During the years 1975–78, Danish research continued in collaboration with three of my students: Gorm Pedersen and Birthe Frederiksen followed up on the focus on Pashtun nomadism and Asta Olesen studied itinerant communities.[4] Also during the 1970s, the anthropologists Asger Christensen and Inger Boesen from Copenhagen University conducted field research in the lower Pech valley of Kunar among settled Pashtuns with focus on land and political power, and women respectively, while Jan Ovesen conducted field work with focus on social organisation and ethno-history among the Pashaii, also in Kunar.

Danish-Afghan academic relations flourished in the middle of the 1970s, and Kabul Museum sent one of its young employees, Farid Younos, for professional training at Moesgaard. The Institute of Social Anthropology at Aarhus University also welcomed Afghan colleagues as guest lecturers, among these notably Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (Minister of Finance in the Transitional Government under Hamid Karzai from 2002–04, and now Chancellor of Kabul University) in 1976, and Prof. Rasul Amin (Minister of Education in the interim government in 2002).

Nomads camping outside Herat



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

While the Danish focus on Afghanistan for decades had centered around research, during the second part of the 1970s development work also began in the form of the support of Danish Church Aid to the Australian, Danish and Dutch supported self-help project 'Reconstruction of Saighanchi Village' – a North Afghan village that had been totally destroyed by a major earthquake during Now Ruz (the Afghan New Year) in 1976. The Australian architect Syed Sibtain gathered not only Danish financial support for the project but also a project team: Asta Olesen participated on the social side and Joergen Funck took up the challenge of teaching the North Afghan villagers how to build and run wind mills for pumping water. Later on Gorm Pedersen also joined for a while.

Within a few months after the Communist coup d'etat in 1978, field research in Afghanistan came to an end for close to two decades. However, follow-up visits and shorter studies were conducted among Afghan refugees in Pakistan by the various researchers. During this period, Asta Olesen's PhD on Politics and Islam in Afghanistan covering 1880–1990 was completed, and the foundation for DACAAR's future large-scale involvement was laid, as described in Inger Boesen's chapters in this book.

Village outside Herat, 2005



Photo: Jesper Cubilo Møgensen

From 1985 onward, the Danish Afghanistan Committee (DAC) initiated a collaboration with Medicins Sans Frontieres and sent a mobile medical team cross-border to provide medical assistance to the population. After the fall of the Najibullah government in 1992, the Danish Afghanistan Committee stationed a team of doctors and nurses in the Herat General Hospital, and since 1997 the organisation has been engaged in running primary health care in the Gozargah district of Herat province.

Even during the years of conflict, the 'Afghanistan interest' of the anthropologists at Moesgaard remained undiminished, and in 1998, the student Kristian Dall joined a DACAAR field team in Ghazni province. Kristian Dall managed to shoot two short films depicting everyday life in the Tajik Deh Hamza village during Taliban time, as well as supplement the museums collections, which resulted in a new UNESCO educational collection from Afghanistan for use in Danish public schools.

Today, after the fall of the Taliban, Danish relations with Afghanistan are as strong as ever – not only are both DACAAR and DAC fully involved in assisting the Afghan government and people in the reconstruction efforts, but the 'official' Denmark is also represented in the form of a liaison office which channels the official Danish assistance mainly to education, human rights and good governance issues. And the next generation of young Danish anthropologists is keeping the tradition of Afghanistan research alive at Moesgaard.

Notes

1 L. Holberg: Myrr-Weis and Myrr-Maghmud. *The stories and achievements, compared in the manner of Plutarch, of several great heroes and illustrious men, particular Oriental and Indian*, Copenhagen 1839, quoted from Lennart Edelberg: Danish Scholars about Afghanistan. In *Afghanistan*, Kabul 1968.

2 A brief outline of the multi-faceted results of these expeditions and the ensuing

ethnographic works of The Danish Scientific Mission to Afghanistan 1953-55 (The Henning Haslund-Christensen Memorial Mission) is provided by Edelberg and Ferdinand (1958).

3 The main results of the work in Afghanistan 1947-49 are published in the following publications: J. Humlum: *La geographie de l'Afghanistan*, Copenhagen 1959, Kund Paludan: *On the Birds of Afghanistan*. Copenhagen 1959, M. Koeie and K.H. Rechinger: *Symbolae Afghanicae; Enumeration and Description of the Plants collected* in L. Edelberg and M. Koeie on *The 3rd Danish Expedition to Central Asia*I-VI. Copenhagen 1954-1965. Furthermore papers on enthomology in *The 3rd Danish Expedition to Central Asia*in Zoological results 1-34. In Videnskb. Medd. Dansk Naturh. For. Vol. 112, 1950-129, 1966.

4 The research of Gorm Pedersen, Birthe Frederiksen and Asta Olesen have since been published by the Carlsberg Foundation Nomad Research project: Asta Olesen (1994): *Afghan Craftsmen: The Cultures of Three Itinerant Communities*. Copenhagen/London & New York, Rhodos/ Thames and Hudson. Birthe Frederiksen: 1995/96): *Caravans and Trade in Afghanistan: The Changing Life of the Nomad Hazarbuz*. Copenhagen/London & New York, Rhodos/Thames and Hudson. Gorm Pedersen (1994): *Afghan Nomads in Transition: A Century of Change among the Zala Khan Khel*. Copenhagen/London & New York, Rhodos/ Thames and Hudson.


Photo: Jesper Gehle Magasinet



Photo: Jesper Gulde Mogensen



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

Chapter 2

Afghanistan: History and Politics



Power Struggles in the 19th and 20th Century

Asta Olesen

During the 1960s and 1970s, Afghan society experienced a social and political crisis which culminated in the Saur Revolution of 1978, when the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power in a coup d'etat, followed by the Soviet invasion in December 1979. This resulted in 23 years of conflict, punctuated by the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the collapse of the PDPA regime in 1992, the Taliban ascent to power after 1996 and the American intervention following 11 September 2001.[1]

Afghanistan's abortive experiment with parliamentary democracy in the period 1964-73 reflected a crisis in the relationship between state and society, i.e. a crisis for the legitimacy of power. During this period, political life was gradually radicalised and the Islamic and the communist movements took root. These two numerically limited movements directly challenged the established social order, each offering its own 'model' for 'the just society', but they were also superimposed upon older deep-rooted divisions with Afghan society. These partly originated in the relationship between tribes and state, since Afghanistan had emerged in 1747 as an independent state through the confederation of Pashtun tribes. For a large part of the population, tribal (and ethnic) affiliation still supersedes other loyalties and thus carries the seeds of the disintegration of the state.

Yet another historical condition which still affects political development is the ethnic heterogeneity of the population and the associated problems of domination. Modern Afghanistan, because of its origin in a Pashtun tribal

confederacy up to the collapse of the PDPA-regime, remained a state run primarily by and for the Pashtun majority of the population, who had conquered areas inhabited by a number of other ethnic groups which today form about half the population. Furthermore, since the end of the 19th century there has been a conflict between religious and secular tendencies in the formulation of a legitimate basis for the exercise of state power vis-à-vis the population. From the 1960s onwards, this latter conflict has been aggravated by the growing gap between cities and countryside, particularly as regards levels of education. After 23 years of conflict, these divisions still haunt Afghanistan's attempt at a new beginning.

Background

The conflict between the secular and religious interpretations of the legitimacy of power dates back to at least the centralisation of the Afghan state at the end of the 19th century.[2] A precondition for the success of the centralisation policy was the breaking of the independence of the traditional power groups in society – the royal lineage, the tribal leaders and the religious establishment – and turning them into groups whose basic interests, economically and politically, coincided with those of the state.

By the end of his rule, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), the founder of the modern Afghan state, had succeeded in these policies to the extent that the power of the tribes vis-à-vis the state was curtailed, the *ulema* (religious scholars) as a group was strengthened through being co-opted into the state, and the Islamic discourse in support of the centralised state and the absolute monarchy was dominant.

The foundation of the 'modern' centralised state apparatus in Afghanistan survived the death in 1901 of the 'Iron Amir', as Abdur Rahman was called, and did not disintegrate in succession struggles, as had been the normal trend during the 19th century. It was not until Amir Abdur Rahman's grandson, King Amanullah, resumed power in 1919 that the question of legitimacy of power became an issue again. King Amanullah was not only a fervent nationalist and pan-Islamist but also a muslim moderniser, wanting to turn Afghanistan into a modern nation-state. King Amanullah's comprehensive reform programme signalled an attempt to revolutionise society and state through a new ideological paradigm, which defined the population's relation to the state as individual citizens rather than as tribesmen, believers or subjects. The failure of this attempt, which ended with the civil war in 1929, resulted during the following years in a constitutional structure which, however inconsistent and contradictory, reflected the distribution of power in society as well as the existence of different ideological discourses.

During the reign of Nadir Shah (1930–33) and Zahir Shah (1933–73), two parallel developments took place: the bureaucratisation of Islam, started towards the end of 19th century, continued, particularly within the legal and educational fields, with the codification of law based on *Shari'a* (Islamic

law), and the establishment of a government-controlled religious educational system. Parallel with this was a gradual secularisation of society due to the spread of secular education and the increasing secularisation of urban cultural life. However, during these years, an incongruity also developed between the socio-economic and political structures of the state: that is, in the lack of representation of the urban middle class in the political sphere. This incongruity was to be solved through the introduction of parliamentary democracy in the new constitution of 1964. Legitimacy of power was based on the nation and popular sovereignty, while laws should not contravene the spirit of *Shari'a.*

The 1964 Constitution brought the political realities into accordance with the political thinking of large parts of the new middle class which dominated the state apparatus. However, as far as the rural majority of the Afghan population was concerned, an increasing gap had developed between the outlook of the traditional rural power groups in society and the new, urban and state-supporting middle class. This conflict contributed to the failure of the democratic experiment in the 1960s, resulting in political unrest and leading to Daoud Khan's coup d'etat in 1973, whereby one section of the new middle class assumed power. Law and order returned with the authoritarian rule of President Daoud, who initially co-opted part of the Left and silenced the religious opposition. However, the policy of repression during the reign of President Daoud (1973–78), far from solving the underlying problems and conflicts, instead aggravated these, and beneath a calm surface, the ideological crisis was deepening within the urban middle class. Meanwhile political culture was becoming ever more radicalised and militant - ultimately making Afghan society a victim to the internal power struggles between the various sections of the new middle class.

Islamists and Communists

The appearance of the new political groups of Islamists as well as the Communists were related to this conflict: both groups were recruited from the same social strata of young, educated middle-class people reacting against their own, frequently rural and traditional background, and against social injustice, nepotism, and the lack of political freedom and civil liberties. The appearance of these new political ideologies among intellectuals and students in Afghanistan dated back to the 1950s and 1960s when Marxist literature reached Afghanistan via the translation of the 'classics' by the Iranian Communist Party (*Tudeh*), and the Islamic movement benefited from the translations of Sayyid Qutb (1906–66, one of the leadig figures in the Muslim Brotherhood, *Ikhwan ul Muslimim,* in Egypt) and others published in Iran, and the translations of Mawlana Abul Ala Maududi (1903–79, the leading figure in the Islamist movement in Pakistan and founder of *Jama'at-i Islami*in 1941) from Pakistan. While the initial inspiration came to Afghanistan from Egypt, Maududi's influence on the Afghan Islamist movement seems to have greatly increased after the 1970s, when a number of Afghan Islamist activists went into exile in Pakistan. In the following years, the parallels between the Communist and

the Islamic movements remained clear in terms of their theories of revolution, subversive strategies and their concept of the state.[3]

The new political ideologies in Afghanistan, both among the Left and the Islamists, reflected the alienation and aspiration for political power of the new middle class and consequently challenged the state as well as the existing social order. But neither the Islamists nor the Left managed to absorb the views of broader sections of the population into their discourse. An indication of this was that just as the traditional parochial identities and primordial alliances of the mass of the Afghan population had been considered a problem for successive generations of absolutists and constitutional nation-builders, so neither the Islamists nor the Left were able or willing to take account of this fact in their totalitarian political ideology.

Photo: Jesper Gulde Magnusson



The Friday Mosque in Herat, 2005

In the initial stages, the common goal of the advancement of Islam was a unifying feature among the various Islamic-oriented groups, but with the increasing radicalisation of politics towards the end of the 1960s, the dividing lines became more clearly defined. In the begining, the main activities of the Afghan Islamists were thus geared towards the general mobilisation within the university circles and educational efforts among members. But from the early 1970s onwards, the strategy changed towards a systematic build-up of cadres in different sectors of society, notably central government agencies with the Ministries of Defence and Education having highest priority, with the aim of ultimately taking power.[4] In these strategic moves, there existed a close parallel with the leftist Khalq which during the 1970s also aimed at, and succeeded in, building up loyal cadres within the armed forces in preparation for a coup.

The elitist party concept combined with the general myth of revolution in the 1960s led the Afghan Islamists into disastrous 'Guevarist' adventurism in the 1970s. With President Daoud's coup in 1973, the suppression of them increased and they became internally divided over questions of strategy: one group headed by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar and Ashmad Shah Masood wanted to engineer a popular uprising, while Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani, fearing lack of popular support, was in favour of continued infiltration of the army in preparation for a counter-coup. However, Hikmatyar's group proceeded, and a series of insurrections was planned in July 1975 (Panjshir, Laghman, Badakhshan). The plan failed miserably as no popular support was forthcoming – but a couple of hundred Islamist activists were

imprisoned, later to be executed, in June 1979, after the PDPA takeover. The movement was thus close to decimation with almost all its leaders in exile and a considerable number of activists in prison – and a clear lack of popular support. After the failed uprisings of 1975, the Islamist leaders lived in relative obscurity in Pakistan until the overthrow of President Daoud in April 1978 by the Islamists' dire enemies, the Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).

The PDPA coup

Although the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan seized power through a bloody coup d'etat in April 1978, it was little known to the large majority of the population living in the rural areas. As a consequence of this it launched a high-profile campaign introducing the Afghan public to its vision of society centred around the struggle between the so-called 'feudals' versus 'toiling workers and peasants'. No previous Afghan government had so actively tried to reach the population with its message and worldview – through radio (and later on television), public rallies, schools, literacy campaigns and so forth. The campaign was successful in reaching the people – within one year there was hardly anybody in Afghanistan who did not know of the 'feudals', but how the message was received was another matter. At a comparatively early stage, the PDPA government thus became identified not just with un-Islamic ways but indeed with outright *kufr* (lit. 'disbelief', i.e. lack of any sort of religious belief) with all its connotations of moral bankruptcy and inherent evil. This view was further consolidated by the PDPA's persecution of the most respected and renowned religious leaders – most significantly the execution in January 1979 of 79 members of the Afghanistan's most prominent religious family, the Mujadidi family, including the Hazrat Sahib Mohammad Ibrahim Mujadidi, head of the Naqsbandi Sufi order in Afghanistan.

Accordingly, the existing social order and all those well-established customs which the PDPA reform policy aimed at changing (through land reform, abolition of debts and mortgages, restrictions on bride price etc.) were perceived as being sanctioned by Islam. Although the reforms were targeting real problems in Afghan society, they were poorly planned and their attempted implementation was based on the exercise of excessive and brutal force. Hence, the shallow popular base of the PDPA, its deadly internal power struggles which broke out very soon after the coup, mismanaged reforms policy plus its highly repressive methods caused a series of uprisings from the summer of 1978 onwards, ultimately leading to a state of civil war in most parts of the country. The situation culminated in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, which, for the majority of the population, removed the last traces of the regime's legitimacy.[5]

Over the next 13 years, civil war and political repression forced more than six million Afghans to flee their country, i.e. between a quarter and a third of the population – thereby constituting the largest caseload ever of

refugees from one country. More than three million refugees found shelter in neighbouring Pakistan, another almost two million in Iran, while the rest went to various European countries and the United States.

Graveyard, Afghanistan



Islamic resistance

It was inevitable that the Afghan resistance formulated itself in terms of religious idioms. From the first scattered uprisings in 1978, it was a broad, popular resistance, lacking organised leadership and coordination. Consequently it was formulated within the existing, predominant outlook which to this day, for a large section of the population, is mainly structured by religious values integrated with tribal, ethnic and other local identities.

Apart from the Islamists, the other parties which managed to assert themselves in the resistance all drew on primordial relations such as tribal and other traditional affiliations, and the personalised relations between leader and followers within the spiritual, religious and secular fields – i.e. the *pir-murid* (spiritual leader-follower), *alim-talib* (religious teacher-student) and patron-client type. And superimposed on this pattern were the ethnic, sectarian and regional loyalties.

The initial decentralised and strongly localised nature of the Afghan resistance meant that the exile parties neither grew out of the resistance, nor were they the origin of it – on the contrary, the situation was at first that of several 'generals without an army' who were gradually able to assume a leading role in the resistance. This situation initially caused many observers to distinguish between the internal resistance and the front commanders on the one side, and the exile parties (as parasites on the resistance) on the other. But ultimately the parties came to dominate the resistance both inside and outside Afghanistan. The main factors in this development were the parties' ability to attract funds and supplies of weapons, in which they were greatly assisted by the Pakistani

government's acknowledgement of only seven parties and its favouritism towards Hikmatyar's *Hezb-i Islami*. The uniform Islamic rhetoric of the resistance should therefore not be interpreted as symptomatic of unity, but on the contrary could be seen as an expression of the fact that Islam served as the medium through which the various divisive forces in Afghan society were played out.

While all the resistance parties and groups agreed about fighting the Kabul regime in the name of Islam, they seriously diverged as to the nature of the future free Afghanistan. In practical politics, these differences meant that while the Islamist parties agreed about the goal being an Islamic state, the moderate/traditionalist parties wanted rule in accordance with the principles of Islam, which seemed to imply a return to *status quo ante* that is before the Daoud Khan coup in 1973. This was, among other things, reflected in the various overtures made to ex-King Zahir Shah in order to use him as a unifying figure for national liberation. As far as the revolutionary Islamists were concerned, any attempt to bring the ex-King back into focus confirmed and aggravated the old enmity between the Islamists and the traditional religious leaders, 'proving' that the latter had always been an integral part of the establishment.

A Soviet tank. Remnants of the Soviet occupation are still scattered around the country. Kabul, 2005



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

In February 1989, after close to ten years' occupation, the Soviet forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan. Contrary to the expectations of most observers, this did not signal the overthrow of President Najibullah's PDPA government which displayed great resilience against attack. Pressurised by the Soviet leaders, President Najibullah carried on with a reconciliation

policy, albeit still receiving their military assistance. An increasing number of non-Communists were included in the Afghan government and in June 1990 the PDPA became the *Hezb-i-Watan*, the Fatherland Party, but still without any prospects of reaching an understanding with the *mujahedin* (fighters in holy war). Najibullah's policy of national reconciliation did not, however, produce any tangible results, since all his overtures were turned down by the Afghan resistance. These were on the other hand, due to lack of coordination and internal conflicts, unable to produce any military break through in their warfare against the PDPA regime.

Notes

1 For a more detailed discussion, see Olesen: *The Islamic Movement in Afghanistan. National Liberation and the Challenge of Power*, pp. 392-411. In David Westerlund (ed): *Questioning the Secular State. The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion and Politics*. Hurst & Company, London, 1996.

2 See also Olesen: *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, NIAS Monograph Series No. 67, Curzon Press, Richmond, 1995

3 Roy 1985; Grevemeyer 1987

4 Roy 1985: 99

5 Olesen, 1995: *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*. Chpt. 9. Curzon Press.

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Chapter 3

1984-1985: Establishing DACAAR



The Birth of DACAAR and the Sewing Project

Inger Boesen

The story of DACAAR first began in February 1981. We – two Danish anthropologists, my husband Asger Christensen and I – had travelled to Peshawar in NWFP[1], Pakistan, for three weeks in order to visit refugee camps in the Peshawar and Mardan areas. Our hope was to trace down people from the village in Kunar, Eastern Afghanistan, where we had carried out field research from 1977–78, before the war. It was during these visits, wet and cold in the miserable rain, and with our shoes stuck in the mud, gazing across the endless rows of drenched UNHCR refugee tents in the camp of Gandaf near Swabi, that the desperate reality of the Afghan refugees struck home to us.

The purpose of our visit to Peshawar and the refugee camps in NWFP was to gather information about the present political scenario and the prospects for the future of Afghanistan. On the background of my research in Afghanistan which had been focused on rural Pashtun women, I was particularly interested in learning about the fate and situation of the refugee women. Especially the situation of the many women who had become widows or for other reasons had become household heads, such as women whose husbands had remained in Afghanistan as members of the resistance.

The information gathered during our visit was intended as a follow-up to our previous research. But what we saw and learned from meetings and discussions with the refugees, including our former, at that time Peshawar-



Gandaf refugee camp

Photo: Inger Boesen

based friends from Kabul University, as well as discussions with UNHCR and NGOs involved in the refugee relief activities, impressed us deeply. Therefore, we decided to change our aim from research to advocacy for improved assistance to the Afghan refugee women, especially widows. We hoped that the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), which already contributed to the emergency assistance through the Danish Red Cross and the Danish Church Aid, would be interested in giving such support.

The war in Afghanistan, the refugee women's situation, and purdah

The background of the exile of approximately three million Afghans was the civil war which followed the coup d'état in April 1978, in which the relatively small Communist party had seized power with support from the Soviet Union and established the 'Democratic Republic of Afghanistan' (DRA) while naming itself the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). It was soon met by a growing popular resistance which evolved in response to the heavy-handed efforts of implementing unpopular reforms on the part of the PDPA government.[2] In order to support the weak PDPA government against the growing resistance, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in December 1979.

Health clinic in Baghchichka refugee camp near Mardan



Photo: Inger Boesen

Already by 1980, considerable numbers of Afghans were fleeing the country, both from the cities as well as from the rural areas. The majority fled to Pakistan, which extended hospitality and massive support to the Afghan refugees, admirably so in view of the poverty of the country. In 1981, at the time of our visit, the number of Afghan refugees in NWFP was estimated at approximately 2.8 million, with almost 2.2 million in NWFP and around 600.000 in Baluchistan. These figures were soon to grow to more than three million, with an estimated number of another two million Afghan refugees in Iran, as well as unknown numbers of primarily urban middle-class Afghans in exile overseas. In Pakistan, the majority of the

Afghan refugees initially lived in tented camps. These refugees were predominantly of a rural background, representing the majority of the pre-war Afghan population, while the relatively small small number of urban refugees attempted to make a living in the cities, primarily Peshawar and Quetta.

The issue that I had found to be most important during my visit to Pakistan in early 1981 had been the desperate situation of the refugee women. Their difficulties also had very negative effects on the life of their children. To a large extent, the particular vulnerability of the women was related to the cultural norms prevailing in Afghanistan concerning gender and the role of women. These norms, which are collectively termed as *purdah* (curtain), refer to the complex of notions about women's place in family and society, according to which the veiling and seclusion of women play a central role in relation to the protection and control of family honour. Mostly, Afghan women are not allowed to own or inherit property apart from personal belongings, and even if the women's work contributes substantially to the household economy, they have little if any influence on the decision-making of the household, especially in relation to economic decisions and public affairs. These norms about women's role and *purdah* were shared by the local population in NWFP as well as the Pakistani refugee authorities.

Member of the Sewing Project, Peshawar, Pakistan



In the refugee camps as well as in the towns in NWFP, the situation and conditions of the women refugees were strongly influenced by these norms of gender and *purdah*.This particularly affected the women who had lost their husbands or contact with their kinship network through the displacement or exile, and who now found themselves in a situation where they had to cope alone for themselves and their children without the economic and social support by men and family. Added to this was that *purdah* norms were even more strictly observed by the refugee community in exile than at home, because the foreign environment was perceived as



Photo: Mikael Witte

Baghchichka refugee camp near Mardan, Pakistan

threatening to their family and women, who were the symbolic embodiment of the honour and identity of the Afghan refugees.[3] Due to *purdah*, the physical and social mobility of the women refugees was thus very restricted, with the result that their access to registration and thereby to aid, such as shelter and food, was difficult. In the early phase of the exile, women's access to health and sanitation facilities was very poor. Very few NGOs had separate clinics for women with female doctors, and women were prevented by *purdah* to consult the general clinics with male doctors. There were practically no sanitary provisions accessible to women in the camps, a fact which seriously affected the women's health and daily existence. *Purdah* also prevented single women engaging in economic activities such as employment or income-generating activities outside the domestic sphere, the 'home'. As women were traditionally economically dependent on their husbands and family network, few if any refugee women had skills that could be used for generating income in the refugee situation, as many male refugees could.[4] Thus widows and female household heads found themselves in a situation where they needed to be able to support themselves and their children, while their means and possibilities of doing so were very limited.

Against this background, I consulted the Danish Refugee Council about the possibilities of initiating a skill-training and income-generating project for the Afghan refugee women, and the idea received a very positive response.

In 1982, I left again for Pakistan with the task of undertaking a survey of

Tailoring course, Peshawar, Pakistan



Photo: Mikael Witte

the possibilities of establishing such a project. The survey, or project identification study, was to be carried out in collaboration with the Austrian Relief Committee for Afghan Refugees (ARC), an Austrian NGO exclusively employing Afghan staff. We had already been in contact with ARC during our visit in 1981.[5] Undertaking the identification or feasibility study in collaboration with an NGO which was already established in Pakistan was a necessary condition for the study, as it was extremely difficult to obtain permission for new relief activities or the establishment of new NGOs in Pakistan due to the presence of a considerable number of aid agencies.[6]

First steps towards establishing the Sewing Project

The identification and feasibility study was carried out in 1982–83 in Bagchichka camp near Mardan, in close co-operation with ARC and especially the staff of the ARC clinic in the camp. Besides running a clinic for women with a female doctor, ARC had also trained and employed an Afghan midwife for the women's needs. This midwife, Badrey, was my main entry-point and link to the refugee families and the women. Badrey, who spoke Pashto similar to the women in the village of our pre-war fieldwork, so that we were able to communicate without any English, was a wonderful 'adoptive mother' to me. Without her help and good relations with the families, the study – and perhaps the resulting Sewing Project – would never have been possible. Through interviews with women about their needs for assistance and their skills and resources for work, I learned about all aspects of their life as refugees – both about their sadness and longing for their homeland which was expressed in Afghan wording as *'my heart becomes so constricted'* – and their desperate need for work that could be acceptable in the social framework of *purdah*.

Badrey, Afghan midwife in Baghchichka refugee camp near Mardan, Pakistan, 1982



Unemployment was, on the whole, a general and serious problem of most Afghan refugees, especially in the camps. The social and psychological effects of lack of employment and something useful to do were felt as 'the most serious illness of all' (in Pashto: *'bekar der sacht maras day'*). There was a deep conflict between the dependency on aid and the traditional Afghan values of independence and autonomy, which were central to the Afghan identity.[7]

Based on my findings from a small embroidery pilot-project carried out in Baghchicha, a draft proposal for a Sewing Project in Peshawar was drawn up in consultation with ARC and submitted to DRC as part of my report. The proposal was presented and discussed with all DRC membership organisations, of which three were willing to fund and support the project. They were Danish People's Aid, Danish Association for International Co-


Photo: Inger Boesen

Embroidered frontpiece for a traditional dress.

operation, and Caritas Denmark. These three NGOs established a Steering Committee for the Sewing Project with DRC as the fourth member.

In December 1983, an agreement was reached with the board of ARC to start the project in collaboration with this NGO. At the same time, a competent and creative Danish handicraft advisor Helle Krüger was employed for the first year of the project. I was to manage the project for as long as it would take to train an Afghan counterpart to take over this role, which we assumed could be done within a year.[8]

While the immediate objective of the Sewing Project was to train Afghan refugee women (primarily widows and female household heads) in tailoring and embroidery skills, in order to enable them to earn an income and thereby become economically self-reliant and able to provide for their children, the project's long-term aim of sustainability and 'Afghanisation' was regarded as equally important. This included that the project was envisaged to become economically viable and self-reliant. Above all, it was planned to evolve within the framework of Afghan traditions of embroidery and handicraft, and to be managed and run by the Afghan refugee women themselves both with regard to overall management and planning, as well as training and design. Development of the Afghan handicraft traditions, as well as capacity-building for future self-management, were therefore key concepts of the projects. It was hoped that in the long run, the project activities could stand on their own feet in a future post-war Afghanistan and thereby provide income opportunities to women-headed households and other women and families.

DACAAR Sewing Project becomes a reality

Thus, as in the fairy tales, after going through a long and arduous process, the Sewing Project for Afghan refugee women finally became a reality in January 1984. As a transitional arrangement until it would be possible to obtain permission – a No Objection Certificate – for establishing the Steering Committee and the project as an independent NGO, the project was started as a separate activity under the 'umbrella' of ARC, with Danish funding and supervision by the Steering Committee. The Sewing Project was first situated in Park Road, in University Town, a suburb of Peshawar.[9] It was vitally important to the credibility and acceptability of the project in the conservative environment, both with regard to the presence of the Afghan resistance parties, the *mujahedin* (fighters in holy war), and to the Pakistani authorities, to maintain an impeccable profile of cultural and social propriety, especially with regard to the norms of *purdah*. This was particularly important in view of the fact that the project was run by Western women who were initially regarded with certain suspicion in the local environment.

Woman working in the Sewing Project, Peshawar



Photo: Inger Boesen

In January 1984, the project consisted of a small staff of four trainers for cutting and stitching by machine, and between ten and 15 trainees. The trainees were paid a small daily stipend to cover their living expenses.[18] There were two office staff (an accountant and a secretary); a kindergarten teacher for the small kindergarten where the project participants could bring their children; a cook; two guards; as well as the driver of a rather run-down minibus belonging to ARC, for the transportation of the women to work and back again in the afternoon. The Sewing Project was buzzing with life and activity from the beginning, and it quickly expanded. The first activities began on a modest scale, but they were soon expanded and developed after the arrival of Helle Krüger in March.



Tailoring course, DACAAR Sewing Project, Peshawar, Pakistan

The big front-room was the tailoring training centre, where the trainees worked at sewing machines at tables in a square, with an adjoining cutting-room, where material was cut, and the cutting techniques demonstrated to the students. The light and spacious central room which was modestly furnished with mattresses and pillows along the walls, and *kelims* (carpets) on the floor, was primarily used for training and production of embroidery. In addition, it was used for rest, social functions, the communal daily lunch, and for weekly meetings in which all the female project staff and students participated. At these meetings the various issues that had occurred during the week, as well as different issues of planning and development of the project activities were discussed, with common participation in the decisions. These meetings were in themselves a learning process to us all, both expatriates and the Afghan participants. Although the women were completely unfamiliar with such democratic discussions and participatory decision-making, they took to the idea with great enthusiasm. Training the participants in structured and disciplined meetings, for example speaking one at a time instead of everyone voicing their opinions across each other took time and patience but involved a mutually fruitful dialogue and lots of laughter. In order to allow for everyone to present their problems for discussion in the weekly meeting, an agenda was introduced, in which the different issues could be entered

during the week. The keeping and structuring of the agenda, as well as co-chairing of the meetings and taking minutes, were a new and valuable experience to the secretary.

The office and the kindergarten, initially including between ten and 15 children below school-going age, were housed in smaller rooms at the back of the house. The kindergarten was equipped with low benches and tables for the children, and all the toys, crayons, and children's books that we had been able to lay hands on through helpful expatriate families who donated their children's toys to the centre when they left Peshawar. The garden offered nice outdoor playing facilities for the children, especially after a swing had been set up.

Helle Krüger developed the initial basic tailoring training into a systematic tailoring course of six months' duration. It was concluded by a formal test and diplomas. As the aim of the tailoring course had been to enable the students to establish themselves as seamstresses to earn an income, each graduating student received a sewing machine as a loan on very easy pay-back terms. But, as the project had meanwhile achieved a circle of customers for customised garments, a small workshop was established to meet these demands. This workshop employed a small number of the most qualified graduates. It continued to function until 1988 when the centre had become too busy to provide tailor-made garments for individual customers.[11] In addition, the production of textile teaching aids was developed for the health, hygiene, and mother-and-child programme run by Save the Children UK. This co-operation continued for several years.

In parallel with the tailoring course, embroidery activities were established in the centre with the participation of refugee women in Peshawar and, on a mobile basis, in Baghchicha camp. The embroideries were paid on a piece-meal basis. The embroidery programme in Baghchicha soon became very successful, involving almost 100 women by the end of the summer of 1984.

Women collecting materiel for school uniforms, Gandaf refugee camp, Pakistan



The embroidery, which was to become the special hall-mark of the Sewing Project, was based on traditional techniques adapted in designs and colour-schemes which were attractive also in the eyes of Western customers. A strict quality-control of all products, including both embroideries, garments, and other items, contributed to establishing the DACAAR Sewing Project as a project maintaining a high standard. The project activities in the refugee camps were extended first in Gandaf, from late 1984, and later in Barakei from 1986. These activities included tailoring training and the stitching of school uniforms and satchels for the refugee children on behalf of UNHCR. The embroidered pieces were mounted in the

sewing centre for the decoration of different garments and other items. The range of these embroidered articles, as well as patterns, colouring and design, was gradually developed to suit Western taste, especially by the two design advisors succeeding Helle Krüger, the British designer Helena Beattie (1986-1988), and later Sussie Mikkelsen, a Danish embroidery specialist.

Designer Helena Beattie



In the initial phase, all trainers, students, and office staff were urban women from Kabul. They included both young and middle-aged women, most of whom were widows. Several of the older women were alone with their children in exile because their husbands were imprisoned in Kabul. The skilled staff – trainers and office staff – mostly had a middle-class background and some formal education. For example the office staff both had working experience from jobs in Kabul. But gradually, as the rumours of the project spread in the refugee community, an increasing number of women with different background applied to participate as trainees or embroiders. Many of these women had a rural background. The refugees, both the women from Kabul and in the camps, had many sad stories to tell. Most of the families in the camps had experienced attacks on their village, loss of neighbours and relatives, and children wounded or killed by mines. Many had made dangerous and difficult journeys to Pakistan through the mountains, mostly on foot, but sometimes transporting children or wounded persons on camel-back.

Producing school uniforms for refugee children



None of the Afghan women spoke any English, except for the secretary whose English skills were very limited. For this reason, practically all communication between Afghans and us expatriates took place through the mediation, as far as it went, by the limited English vocabulary of the secretary; and my Pashto and Dari learned in Afghanistan were very useful. But despite the language problems, communication was lively between the Afghan women and the Danish advisors. Body language and practical co-operation also went a long way in establishing communication, especially between the handicraft advisor and the women in the workrooms. The everyday activities of work and rest provided rich opportunities for talking about each others' lives and experience. The women who participated in the project were generous in sharing their experience and histories with us, both in the context of workrooms and office, and inviting us to their homes. To the refugee women participating in the project, in the centre as well as in the camps, the social and psychological aspects of the project were almost as important as the economic dimension. In particular the women in the Sewing Project in Peshawar lived very isolated lives, in small rented rooms or apartments, and with very restricted possibilities of leaving their homes

due to *purdah* and fear of harassment. The project offered a socially acceptable opportunity of being together and sharing their histories, sorrows and losses, sometimes crying together, but also discussing their hopes for the children and the future. Music was an important element of this communication. The women often brought tapes with songs from their homeland, and Helle Krüger's musical talents also contributed to making the Sewing Project a secure and confident social space for the women.

Tailoring course, Peshawar, Pakistan



Photo: Mikael Witte

But at the same time, the social processes of the project were not always idyllic. As in most other working-places, gossip and jealousy for example with regard to employment and salaries were common. This competitive atmosphere was reinforced by the often strong and fiercely voiced personalities and individualism of the Afghan women. Managing the Sewing Project was thus quite a challenge. My personal experience of managing the project, including staff, students, practical problems as well as the planning and development of the project activities and the marketing of the products, required the skills and resources of an octopus. On reflection, I have never learned so much about people as through this job. These lessons included learning about Afghan women and culture and about myself, as well as learning to make difficult and unpopular decisions and priorities between the interests of the project and the needs of the desperately impoverished refugee women. Through later discussions with our successors, both handicraft advisors and managers,[12] it was clear that this experience was shared by us all.

In July 1984, my prolonged negotiations with the Commissioner for Afghan Refugees (CAR) in NWFP for clearance of the project, which had been supported by UNHCR and the Danish Embassy, were finally met with success in the form of the No Objection Certificate. To a large extent, this could be ascribed to the reputation of the Sewing Project of a relatively high standard of production which had been achieved by a strict quality control. Especially in relation to the conservative local and Afghan community and the sensitive issue of establishing a women's project, the carefully achieved reputation of respectability with regard to observing the Afghan cultural norms and *purdah* played an important role. DACAAR was now formally and technically recognised as an NGO. One and a half years later, the single activity of DACAAR, the Sewing Project, was to be dramatically extended to a wide scope of activities for refugees in the NWFP.

Notes

1 The North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, including the 'Tribal Agencies' in the region bordering Afghanistan.

2 See for example A. Christensen (1995) for a more detailed analysis of the background and emergence of the war (A. Christensen: *Aiding Afghanistan. The Background and Prospects for*

Reconstruction in a Fragmented Society). NIAS Reports, No. 26, (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies); Copenhagen 1995. See also A. Olesen (1995), pp.257-258, for a discussion of the popular resistance to the PDPA including the party's perceived lack of legitimacy in relation to Islam (A. Olesen: *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*. Curzon Press, London 1995.)

3 See my article entitled *Honour in Exile*. In: *FOLK*, vol. 28., Danish Ethnographic Association, Copenhagen 1986. (Also published in: Anderson. E. and Hatch Duprée, N. (eds.): *The Cultural Basis of Afghan Nationalism*. London and New York, 1990); and my five articles in 'Flygtninge' ('Refugees'), vol 2, 1983 (special issue on Afghan refugees), published by the Danish Refugee Council, Copenhagen, May 1983.

4 Most rural Afghan women were illiterate; only two to three per cent were estimated as having any formal education.

5 This contact had mainly been established through our friendship with the Austrian chairman, the late Dr. A. Janata, an ethnologist with long-standing experience of Afghanistan, including as advisor to the German funded Paktia rural development project.

6 A fact which made it particularly difficult to Western NGOs to obtain clearance for activities in the NWFP was that some of the organisations already active had been suspected by the local authorities of covert Christian conversion activities. Moreover, the government of Pakistan wished to avoid a situation similar to the post-conflict phase in Cambodia when more than 100 international agencies operated with little or no co-ordination.

7 The study and the findings from Baghchicha were supplemented, and my findings largely confirmed, by visits to already existing income-generating projects in different camps, especially in co-operation with UNHCR. See my report entitled *Towards the Self-Reliance of Afghan Refugees? A Study of the Need and Feasibility of Establishing Income-Generating and Skill-Training Projects for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, particularly with a View to Women*. Danish Refugee Council, Copenhagen, 1983; and my article *From Autonomy to Dependency: Aspects of the 'Dependency Syndrome' among Afghan Refugees*. In: *Migration today*, vol. XII, no. 5. 1985.

8 This was envisaged to be done within the first year, but it was to last until 1994 before the Sewing Project was run and managed by Afghan women.

9 At the end of the first year, when the lease was up, the centre was moved to new premises on Jamal-ud Din al-Afghani Road (from February 1985). Later in 1985, the Sewing Project was shifted to a remote location on Kohat Road in the South-Western part of Peshawar, a relocation which turned out to be disadvantageous in many respects. In February 1987, the project was therefore moved back to University Town, first back to Jamal-ud din al-Afghani Road, and in 1987 to Gul Mohar Lane next to the DACAAR main office.

10 This practice was discontinued in 1986, as it was found that only about 16 per cent of the graduated trainees from the Sewing Project actually sought employment as tailors. The stipend was replaced by the donation of a free sewing-machine at graduation, instead of the practice in the first years of giving the machines on a credit basis with easy terms of repayment.

11 See the DACAAR Annual Report 1988.

12 Both Helle Krüger's and my own contracts terminated in March 1985. As we both had families and children in Denmark, neither wished to extend. The subsequent expatriate project managers were Grethe Lauritzen (1995); Agnete Vemmelund (1986-1988); Gina Holmen (1988-1990); and Dorthe Kanst (1990-1994). After 1994, the management of the project was taken over by Afghan staff. However, from 1989 to 1993 I had the opportunity of visiting Peshawar and the Sewing Project for relatively long periods, as my husband was involved with the DACAAR Rehabilitation Programme for four years between 1988 and 1993.











Chapter 4

1986-1988: Scaling Up



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

Water Supply for Afghan Refugees in NWFP

Inger Boesen

From December 1985, negotiations had been ongoing between UNHCR and DACAAR about DACAAR taking over the water supply programme for Afghan refugees in NWFP. This programme had been initiated by Care International in 1980 and expanded by UNICEF from 1981, to cover most of the districts and agencies in NWFP. As UNICEF is not normally an implementing agency, it was decided that DACAAR would take over the programme from July 1986. This take-over was the beginning of a remarkable expansion of the activities of DACAAR under the management of Niels Christian Andersen. By the end of 1987, DACAAR was responsible for the maintenance of water supply and water distribution systems in most of the camps of the whole NWFP.

Søren Nielsen at DACAAR Hand Pump Factory, Swabi, Pakistan



The expansion also included a number of other project activities which were related to the water supply programme, namely the development of community hand pumps and the establishment of a hand pump factory located in Swabi (Mardan District) by Soeren Nielsen; the construction of baths in the refugee compounds in the camps; and the establishment of a cross-programme health and hygiene education project which aimed to teach the refugees about the hazards to health caused by the use of contaminated drinking



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

Peshawar, Pakistan, 2004

water, and the importance of hygiene. This education project also especially addressed the Afghan refugee women, with a female trainer. In addition to the projects related to water supply, an access-road construction and maintenance project for a number of refugee camps was also taken over by DACAAR in late 1987.

Meeting the needs of the large refugee population for clean drinking water had been an essential element of the joint assistance by UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan from the beginning of the influx of refugees. In 1986, the estimated number of refugees in NWFP was approximately 2.2 million, with about 60 per cent in the settled districts and 40 per cent in the 'tribal agencies'. The target of UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan was to supply every person with 25 litres of potable water per day. The task was huge. In addition, the refugees' need for water for household consumption such as cooking and washing was increasing with time as the refugee settlements gradually became more permanent and 'urbanised'.

Water supply, the problem of contamination, and the Hand Pump Factory

The main forms of water supply were shallow wells in the camps, which were improved and maintained by the refugees themselves with assistance from DACAAR. It was estimated that about half of all refugees in NWFP relied on improved shallow wells for their water supply at the end of 1987, the first year of DACAAR's engagement in the programme.[1] A second method was the drilling of medium-depth wells in areas where digging of shallow wells was not possible, whereby eventually water could be supplied through piped water schemes. The piped water schemes were carried out by the Public Health Engineering Department. But, as they were several times more costly to establish and maintain than wells, they were mostly used where the water table was too low for the digging or drilling of wells. On the other hand, the piped water system was less prone to contamination, which was a general problem in relation to the water supply. The main intervention to protect the water of the wells from contamination was different methods of chlorination, which had varying but limited success.

Producing hand pumps in Swabi, Pakistan



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

As a more durable solution to the contamination problem, DACAAR decided in 1986 to install sturdy hand pumps as part of the improvement of the wells. These hand pumps were developed from a model developed with technical assistance from the World Bank. This so-called 'Afridev' pump was



Photo: DACAAR Archive

Habib-ur Rehman, Hand Pump Factory manager, Pakistan



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

The Indus hand pump

Water managers, NWFP, Pakistan



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

further developed to meet the needs for robustness and easy community-based maintenance. The resulting 'Indus Pump' was produced by the hand pump factory established by DACAAR in 1987, with support from Danida and under the responsibility of Danish advisors.

Production of hand pumps in Pakistan

The Hand Pump Factory began production towards the end of 1987. In addition to the production, the Hand Pump Factory offered valuable opportunities of employment as well as mechanical training for Afghan refugees. In 1988, the production amounted to 668 pumps which were sold locally, to other agencies and to the DACAAR water supply project. At the end of 1989, it was estimated that the factory could be commercially viable, thus providing a valuable income-generating activity for the Afghan refugees.[2] The 'Afridev' or 'Indus' pump soon became the type of pump most widely used in the refugee communities, and was promoted by UNICEF as the standard community pump for all refugee settlements in NWFP.[3] Similarly, the refugee community-based scheme for the supervision and maintenance of the hand pumps provided training and income generation. The hand pumps were installed in the refugee camps or villages with the cost contribution of ten per cent by the users in order to encourage shared responsibility and ownership of the pumps. Moreover, the caretakers of the pumps, selected among the refugees themselves as 'water-managers', were trained in the importance of hygiene for preventing water-borne disease, and in dissemination of this education in the communities.

By the end of 1987, DACAAR could conclude that the aspects of community participation and contribution, as well as the health education, of the water supply programme both with regard to maintenance of hand pumps and wells, especially the shallow-wells, had been successful, and that the awareness and co-operation of the refugees was excellent.[4]

Purdah and the use of water

There were other problems related to the water supply programme apart from contamination. As the refugees became more settled, and the camps changed appearance to villages with the construction of mud-houses surrounded by walls, problems arose concerning the shared use of the water especially with regard to the wells and the baths. In this context, similar to the Sewing Project, the norms of *purdah* played an important role.

Due to the *purdah* restrictions, it became increasingly difficult to



Producing well rings, Pakistan, December 1986

Afghan refugees, Pakistan



persuade the refugees to use communal wells, and to dig wells outside the walled compounds. Instead, the refugees preferred to use the unsafe water from unimproved, private wells dug inside their compounds, and many wells which were originally communal, were enclosed within walls. To solve this problem, DACAAR began in 1987 to chlorinate the unimproved private wells, and to assist the users in improving the wells by selling well rings at cost price. At the same time, many of the previously common, but now enclosed wells were improved, on condition of accessibility by a number of families. These activities continued through 1988. In 1988, it was estimated that each well was being used by an average of 30 families or 210 persons. Thus the total estimated number of beneficiaries of the DACAAR water supply project, adapted to the changing needs of the refugees, was estimated at approximately 2.2 million refugees, or about 99 per cent of the refugees in NWFP.[5]

The bath (*hamam*) project was perhaps even more sensitive to the cultural norms of *purdah*, since women could only use washing and bathing facilities located in the family houses. The bath project, which was proposed in 1986 and implemented from early 1987, aimed to provide a simple but functional washing facility for refugee families in the camps, on the background that skin diseases and other diseases related to lack of hygiene were widespread and contributed strongly to the morbidity and mortality of the refugees. In Afghanistan, washing and religious ritual ablutions had been common practices. The few existing washing facilities in private houses were small and inadequate, with mud floors and no room for water storage. The baths constructed by DACAAR were small but adequate rooms with concrete floors and proper drainage. These baths, which were used by households of averagely ten to 12 persons, contributed remarkably to the improvement of the health and well-being of the refugees. At the end of 1988, 663 baths were constructed, and 1,066 in 1989. In connection with the bath project, the health and hygiene education programme was extended to access the women and families in their homes.

Notes

1 DACAAR Annual Report 1987:11.
2 DACAAR Annual Report 1989: 19.
3 Ibid.
4 DACAAR Annual Report 1987:19.
5 DACAAR Annual Report 1988:14.

Chapter 5

1989-1993: Cross-border Operations



Photo: Mir Ahmad

Moving into Afghanistan

Asger Christensen

The signing of the Geneva Agreements in April 1988 and the scheduled withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan by 15th February 1989 created the expectation that this would be followed by regime change and the emergence of peaceful conditions. In turn, this would enable the return of the more than 5.5 million Afghan refugees exiled in Pakistan and Iran. In response to this assessment, which in hindsight proved to be totally mistaken, aid agencies including DACAAR began to prepare to meet the enormous challenge of creating conditions within Afghanistan that would support the recovery of the Afghan economy, infrastructure, and social services to prevent another tragedy when the refugees returned.

Travel was difficult before the collapse of the Najibullah regime. Paktika, April 1989



Photo: Asger Christensen

I arrived in Peshawar in August 1988 equipped with what must have been the oldest and most decrepit portable typewriter in the possession of the Danish Refugee Council. The task was to assess the feasibility of undertaking rehabilitation activities in Afghanistan. Since it turned out that a number of reports providing general background information on the situation in Afghanistan had recently become available, and since these reports together with information from NGOs engaged in

cross-border programmes indicated that rehabilitation activities were feasible, it was decided to take the next step and begin preparation of a rehabilitation programme. A proposal was drafted and submitted in September to Danida, the Danish International Development Agency. On 16 November, the proposal was passed by the Board of Danida, and funding to the tune of DKK 18.5 million (approximately US$3 million) was approved by the Finance Committee of the Danish Parliament.

DACAAR's rehabilitation strategy

The basis for DACAAR's rehabilitation strategy was its engineering experience from the refugee assistance programme comprising water supply and road construction, which placed it in a unique position to respond to the infrastructure rehabilitation needs in the rural areas from which most of the refugees hailed. It was envisioned that as the refugees returned, and the needs for continued assistance to the camps declined, DACAAR's engineers could move across the border to Afghanistan and use their skills to scale up the rebuilding of their country. Five main components were identified which together would provide the foundation for a recovery of rural communities.

1. Rehabilitation of irrigation systems
2. Support for the reestablishment of agricultural production
3. Rebuilding of houses and public buildings (e.g. schools)
4. Road repair
5. Drinking water supply

To these were added an additional component - engineering training - to help remedy the critical lack of Afghan engineering expertise. The long term vision was that the engineering and management skills of DACAAR staff would equip them to contribute to the reconstruction and

Road repair in Tangi Zadran, Khost, 1993



Photo: Asger Christensen

Photo: Alger Christensen



Irrigation rehabilitation in Khost, 1991

development as members of the Afghan state administration or private sector entities when a political settlement was reached sometime in the future.

Alongside the existing Refugee Programme, a parallel Rehabilitation Programme was established to manage the activities in Afghanistan. Within the programme, sections were established for each of the five main components as well as for engineering design and monitoring.

The assistance by the Rehabilitation Programme was not only aimed at returning refugees, but at whole communities. From the beginning, DACAAR's Rehabilitation Programme was conceived as a community rehabilitation and development programme, based on the underlying philosophy that this would promote equity in access to assistance, accelerate the process of reconstruction, and prevent the animosity and conflicts which would result if refugees and the internally displaced alone were defined as the target group. The final element of the strategy was that the programme would be implemented in several defined and relatively small areas to ensure that the package of interventions would achieve tangible impacts in terms of local recovery. The selection of these programme areas was done with the consideration that DACAAR staff should be able to continue activities through the year, if necessary by shifting between summer and winter areas, and that in the event of local conflict, staff could relocate from one area to support ongoing activities in another.

Working in a stateless society

With funding and a strategy in place, the next step confronting the Rehabilitation Programme was to get activities started up on the ground inside Afghanistan. By February 1989, the last units of the occupying Soviet army had pulled out of Afghanistan, leaving their client regime under President Najibullah in control of the major towns and surrounding countryside, while the remaining 80 per cent of the country comprising devastated and often totally depopulated villages was under the control of a fragmented *mujahedin* (fighters in holy war) resistance.

News of the establishment of the DACAAR Rehabilitation Programme soon spread, and from January 1989 onwards, representatives of communities inside Afghanistan and local *mujahedin* commanders began to visit the office in Peshawar with requests for assistance. Activities were considered in Qarabagh in Ghazni province, Narang in Kunar, Rodat in Nangarhar, Bariki Barak in Logar, and Katawaz in Paktika.



Photo: Asger Christensen

The anthropologist at work – Bernt Glatzer during needs assessment in Khost, May 1991

The winter of 1988–89 was the most severe that Afghanistan had experienced in 16 years, and travel to the high altitude areas only became possible in April. Nangarhar remained out of reach since the *mujahedin* offensive to take Jalalabad after the Soviet withdrawal had failed, and Kunar could still only be reached by going through Jalalabad (later in the spring of 1989, a rough road was constructed across the Nawa Pass from the Tribal Agency of Bajaur in Pakistan into Kunar). For expatriate NGO staff to cross the border through Pakistan's Tribal Areas to Afghanistan was at that time illegal in the eyes of both the Pakistani and Afghan authorities. So, when we set out on the first field trip to Qarabagh in Ghazni in April 1989, I had to get out of the car before we came to the official check-posts in the South Waziristan Agency, circle around them, and re-join my Afghan colleagues further down the road. Later, when NGO cross-border activities became more frequent, the willingness of the Pakistani authorities to keep an eye closed increased, and with the collapse of the Najibullah regime in April 1992, visas could suddenly be obtained from the Afghan consulate two houses down Gul Mohar Lane from DACAAR's office, and permits to cross the Tribal Agencies were issued by the Pakistani authorities.

Since until April 1992 all of the larger towns were under government control, and since the gravel roads in the countryside were frequently mined, traveling in Afghanistan usually meant using the same tracks and riverbeds that were used by both the *mujahedin* and the traders smuggling goods ranging from tyres to electronics into Pakistan. The countryside over which the *mujahedin* held sway was one of devastated villages, uncultivated fields, and defunct irrigation systems, and the socio-political conditions were those of a stateless society characterised by pronounced political fragmentation and rivalry.

Anti-tank mine found during road repair in Kunar, 1990



Photo: Asger Christensen

In this situation, the major problem facing any outside agency implementing assistance projects was the identification of local counterparts with whom agreements could be made, and who could be involved in the implementation of the activities. To safeguard the key principle of equitable access to assistance irrespective of political, tribal, or ethnic affiliation, DACAAR therefore consistently attempted to obtain agreements for project implementation with representatives of all the political or tribal groups in a particular area. One way of achieving this was to look for and occasionally encourage the formation of *shura* (Arabic for council), comprising representatives of all the relevant sub-groups in the area in question. Yet, useful as such gatherings might be as an entry point to specific areas, the experience was that *shura* are very fragile forms of organisations, which are not geared towards day-to-day

administration or management of project activities. Furthermore, they are likely to break up due to internal tensions, and often not fully representative of the sub-groups in the area because pervasive rivalry leads to the exclusion of one group or another from the council.

Thus, in the Qarabagh district in Ghazni, divisions were based on affiliation to different political parties, and one group was trying to exclude their rivals from access to assistance. DACAAR had initially negotiated with a *shura* comprising representatives from four *mujahedin* parties, but the fifth and largest party in the area had been excluded. Fortunately this was detected at an early stage, and negotiations with all five parties led to an agreement that they would participate in the same *shura*.



Photo: Asger Christensen

Voluntary community labour for shallow well improvement, Khost, 1991

A year later, when rehabilitation activities had been under way for some time in Qarabagh, and DACAAR wanted to extend the assistance from the Pashtun on the plain to the Hazara in the hills to the west, it became clear that ethnic tensions in this particular area were so strong that it would be very difficult to realise the principle of ethnic equity in the provision of assistance. In Kunar, the situation was a variation on the same theme, but with added complications, since the area is ethnically complex, and since a new religious movement inspired and supported by radical, mainly Saudi Wahabi Muslims had gained a foothold in parts of the province. This movement, which was locally known as *Salafi*, had a tense relationship with the other *mujahedin* parties since both viewed each other as heretics, and as a result both had established rival provincial *shura* after the withdrawal of the Kabul regime from Kunar in October 1988.

The foregoing two examples illustrate that the basic conditions that could critically influence assistance activities exhibited profound variations from one locality to the next, and also that information on these conditions was often quite difficult to obtain in advance. However, underlying these fluid and volatile local political configurations that the aid agencies encountered in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a basic pattern, which seems to be essentially the same as that which existed in the Afghan countryside before the war, and which continues to shape politics today as well.

DACAAR engineers discussing irrigation rehabilitation in Sarbari, Khost, 1992



Photo: Asger Christensen

This pattern is one where rival local leaders are grouped into two, sometimes more, coalitions or alliance blocks which confront each other in the competition for local dominance and control over resources. While the pattern remains fairly stable, the composition of the alliance blocks is not necessarily so and individual leaders may change

their allegiances if this serves their interests. The competition between these alliance blocks (and within them among the local leaders and *mujahedin* commanders, who today are labeled 'warlords') also involves competition for access to external resources that can be used to attract political followers and increase local influence.

During the resistance struggle against the Soviet and Afghan armies in the 1980s, the critical external resource was arms. With the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the Najibullah regime in April 1992, the flow of arms into Afghanistan was drastically reduced (although it did not entirely stop), and instead, the growing external reconstruction aid became a significant external resource that was intensely contested by local leaders, tribal groups, and communities. Real or imagined bias or favoritism at a personal or group level was likely to create resentment on the part of those who felt left out. Care therefore had to be taken to establish similar arrangements with different local groupings, be they political, tribal, or ethnic, to avoid accusations of bias and partiality, which could escalate into active opposition to project implementation if this was perceived as benefiting someone's local political rivals.

Photo: Asger Christensen



Farmer and his son in Qarabagh, 1992

Political neutrality and equal access to the assistance provided by different groups within a particular area was and is therefore not only a question of aid ethics, but also a practical requirement for the successful provision of rehabilitation assistance. To achieve this is always an intricate and often time consuming process. Over time, this approach provided DACAAR with a reputation for political neutrality, which was a significant asset in the highly competitive political context in which the assistance had to be provided. However, sometimes situations arose where equity and impartiality could simply not be pursued, as when DACAAR tried to extend its operations in Qarabagh from the Pashtuns to the Hazaras in the hills further to the west. The Pashtun *shura* argued that since there were in their estimate about six times as many Pashtuns in Afghanistan as Hazaras, they were entitled to receive correspondingly more assistance compared with the Hazara, and if not, then they would block the assistance from reaching the Hazara. Since this issue could not be resolved, DACAAR in the end decided to terminate its activities in Qarabagh.

Implementation begins

Notwithstanding problems like this, DACAAR's activities grew steadily from 1989 onwards, with activities primarily in Kunar, Ghazni, Paktika, and Nangarhar provinces. After the fall of Khost town in the eastern Paktia province to the *mujahedin* in April 1991 (one of two towns that the

mujahedin managed to conquer militarily), DACAAR was approached by representatives of two small Pashtun tribes – the Manduzai and Ismail Khel – who were living as refugees in camps across the border in the North Waziristan and Kurram tribal agencies in Pakistan. A joint needs assessment was carried out with elders from the two tribes in May, and activities started up shortly afterwards first in the Manduzai district to the west of Khost and later in Yakubi to the north.

Seed and fertilizer distribution in Kunar, 1990



Photo: Asger Christensen

The package of activities envisioned to facilitate the return of the refugees and the recovery of their villages proved to be effective. Initially, men came back to their villages from the refugee camps and began reestablishing the irrigation systems, which constituted the basis not only for agricultural production, but also for reconstruction of the houses which were made of clay and required water to be built. The next step was the provision of seed and fertilizer, which was supplied in collaboration with FAO. The agricultural assistance was later expanded with distribution of fruit trees, locally grown vegetable seeds, wheat and maize seed multiplication, and agricultural demonstration plots and extension. To facilitate the rebuilding of houses, reinforced concrete roof beams were locally produced and distributed (at cost) so that each family received a sufficient number of beams to construct two rooms. At the same time local roads were repaired after de-mining by UN-trained Afghan de-miners from other agencies. With irrigation water running in the canals, crops on the fields, and houses under reconstruction, women and children began to return from the camps in Pakistan. The next steps were assistance to rebuild schools, so that the children could continue their education, and to provide access to safe drinking water. Within about two years, the villages were almost fully rebuilt, and life had returned to something resembling pre-war normalcy. The same process unfolded in other areas such as the district of Narang in Kunar, and Mohmand Darra in Nangarhar.

Drinking water supply

With the reduction in UN's refugee assistance programme during 1991, capacity became available in DACAAR to start up rural drinking water supply in Afghanistan. Teams of skilled engineers and foremen from the

Irrigation canal passage under riverbed in Khost, 1993



Photo: Asger Christensen

refugee programme moved across the border, first to Kunar, and later to Khost, Kandahar, and Nangarhar, and began rural drinking water projects comprising dug wells fitted with the DACAAR-manufactured 'Afridev' hand pumps or with reels and buckets.

Returning refugees in Pech valley, Kunar, 1993



Photo: Asger Christensen

The challenge confronting the water supply programme was not primarily technical, since the DACAAR staff mastered the technical aspects from their years of work in the refugee camps, but social. As demonstrated by lessons from other South Asian countries, the installation of hand pumps without a functioning community managed maintenance system would not yield sustainable benefits.

The projects in Afghanistan were and continue to be based on an approach that establishes an autonomous community-based maintenance system that can function independently of external support, whether from DACAAR or the government. The approach is based on three principles which are: community skills, community payment, and community access to spare parts.

Community skills are developed by training local persons with a relevant background, such as blacksmiths or mechanics as hand pump mechanics. One hand pump mechanic will serve a number of hand pump user groups, thus earning an income that can supplement his existing trade. Some hand pump mechanics develop skills in installing hand pumps and are able to

establish a business based on this. Community payment is ensured through negotiations with village elders, who commit the user group to pay for all labour and spare part costs related to the maintenance and repair of the hand pump and well. To enhance the ownership and commitment by the user group regarding the maintenance of the hand pump, it is necessary to provide all unskilled labour free of charge in connection with the digging or improvement of the well and installation of the pump. Community access to spare parts is established by selecting shop keepers in local bazaars who will stock and market hand pump spare parts as part of their business. To ensure the supply of spare parts, the shop keepers are linked up with the hand pump factories in Pakistan that manufacture the 'Afridev' pump.

A drinking water supply project has two objectives, namely providing easier access to safe water, and improving public health. While the first objective is immediately achieved, since the installation of wells with hand pumps next to peoples' residences result in a significant reduction in the work load of women and children, who are the principal water collectors, the second objective is more elusive. Access to safe drinking water is a precondition for improving public health, but is not in itself sufficient to bring this about. Additional measures that improve hygienic and sanitary practices are required. The first step to put such measures in place was to accompany the provision of water supply with the construction of baths and latrines on a more limited scale as demonstration projects. However, without an understanding of the relationship between safe water, personal hygiene, and health, and the behavior required to ensure this relationship, the hardware investments would not have the intended health effects. To promote such behavioral change, hygiene education was introduced from 1996 onwards involving female educators in order to be able to reach village women, who are the ones primarily responsible for fetching and using water for within the domestic sphere.

Refugee camp with DACAAR hand pump outside Jalalabad, 1993



Photo: Asger Christensen

When I left DACAAR in mid-1993, the water supply programme had improved or dug more than 1,000 wells, of which about half were equipped with hand pumps. Since then, the programme has expanded dramatically, and by 2004, a total of more than 33,000 wells had been provided in Pakistan and Afghanistan since the beginning of DACAAR's water supply activities, giving more than 4.5 million persons access to safe drinking water. Most of these were in rural areas, but tube wells with hand pumps have also been installed in urban areas and in the new refugee camps that sprang up around Jalalabad after the *mujahedin* started fighting each other for control over Kabul. In addition, a number of small, medium, and large gravity pipe schemes have been constructed. At the same time, DACAAR has been providing training for staff from other NGOs in the technical and

social dimensions of rural drinking water supply. This has created the framework for a joint approach to the provision of safe drinking water based on the use of one hand pump type, thus avoiding the problems found in many other developing countries, where different donors have introduced different pump types requiring different spare parts.

Over the five years since its beginning in 1988, DACAAR's Rehabilitation Programme had come a long way by mid-1993 with ongoing operations in the provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, Khost, Paktia, Paktika, and Ghazni, and a staff of around 250 persons. The old portable typewriter on which the initial feasibility assessment and programme proposal was hammered out had long since been discarded and replaced with up-to-date computers that were used by both Afghan and expatriate programme management staff to handle the growing volume of data involved in the day-to-day operations, planning, monitoring, and reporting.



Photo: Asger Christensen



Photo: Asger Christensen



Photo: Asger Christensen



Photo: Asger Christensen

Chapter 6

1994-1997: Aid and the Taliban



The Arrival of the Taliban

Asta Olesen

October 1994 brought a new political-military group on the scene of Afghanistan's 16-year old civil war: the Taliban, the religious student militia originated among the Afghan refugees who attended religious schools (*madrasa*) in Pakistan. During the following three years, the Taliban managed to conquer 90 per cent of Afghanistan, while small pockets of resistance in north-east (Panjshir and Badakhshan) remained under the legendary commander Ahmad Shah Masood.

Poster portraying Ahmad Shah Masood, Kabul, 2005



Initially, the Taliban were welcomed by the population because of their ability to guarantee peace and physical security. But with the conquest of the large cities like Herat and Jalalabad, the extreme gender and educational policies and religious totalitarian policies of the Taliban created local resistance and considerable international criticism. Both grew steadily after the occupation of Kabul in 1996 and then Mazar-i Sharif and Central Afghanistan (in 1998) where the Taliban committed atrocities against the hostile local population. International pressure began to build up, primarily as a result of the refuge granted to the Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, whom USA suspected of being the mastermind behind several terror actions during the 1990s. This suspicion led in 1998 to American bombings of suspected Bin Laden training camps in Eastern Afghanistan and subsequently to some of the toughest international sanctions ever imposed upon a poor country. In

2001, the Taliban regime was reeling under international sanctions while more than three years of drought destroyed agriculture and livestock production and caused widespread hunger. This was the situation when Afghanistan and the Taliban were catapulted to the front pages by the attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September, 2001.

Aid and development during Taliban rule

The Taliban's arrival on the Afghan war scene in September 1994 and their gradual conquest of most of the country introduced a semblance of central rule. This development of one increasingly dominant force on the Afghan scene raised a host of significant issues for the aid agencies regarding how to respond to the Taliban and their policies. The most prominent issue was the Taliban policy on gender, which directly contradicted the international convention on human rights. Other edicts and activities of the *Amr-e-Bil Maruf wa Nahai Anil Munkar* (Dept. for the Preservation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) and administrative regulations imposed on aid agencies also constituted violations of human rights and/or of international law.

The focus on the Taliban records on human rights neither implied that the other warring factions in Afghanistan had a clean human rights record nor a non-discriminatory policy on gender issues. On the contrary, all the groups had failed gravely in this respect which was well documented by Amnesty International. The specific concern about the Taliban was brought about by the fact that their gender policy both in principle and practice was more extreme than anything seen before, and their totalitarian ambitions were becoming increasingly clear. At the same time, the Taliban showed a limited ability to deal with governance and administration resulting in increased suffering of the civilian population.

In spite of the Taliban forces controlling most of Afghanistan, this was still an anarchic, stateless society rather than a totalitarian state. Neither the Taliban nor any of the other factions had been able to set up a proper administrative system formulating coherent policies, not to mention implementing these on larger scale. It was still a society where the local power holders were decisive – whether they belonged to Taliban or any other faction. This posed a question to the aid agencies operating in Afghanistan: whether to relate to the power-that-be in Kabul as if it was a proper government – or to risk the consequence of Afghanistan being a fragmented state and develop strategies according to the varying conditions at local level, be they districts or provinces. With its engagement in the rehabilitation of Afghanistan since 1989, DACAAR had by and large followed the latter course, working in areas where security and political conditions enabled it to reach the target groups of various programmes.

In view of these obstacles, DACAAR decided to continue to work in Afghanistan as long as it was able to implement according to its given strategies and principles[1] and to reach the defined target group(s) of the various programmes. The approach chosen vis-a-vis the Taliban to achieve this goal was flexible and depended upon an analysis of the given context

and the nature of the programme involved. Hence, constructive negotiations at local level were sought in order to achieve the best possible conditions to work for implementation of immediate programme objectives and reaching the defined target groups. The 'bottom line' was thus defined by whether DACAAR would be able to implement programmes according to its overall strategy and principles and to reach the target group of specific programmes – if not, then the project/programme would close or be suspended at local, regional or national level. This general policy was followed during the years of DACAAR involvement in Afghanistan, also before the arrival of the Taliban.

Health education

In 1996, DACAAR started health education as a new activity associated with drinking water supply in order to enable communities to reap the full health benefits of clean drinking water. The focus of the health education component was to create awareness among the communities of the dangers of polluted water and the need for better hygiene practices, ultimately inducing improved health behaviour. To accomplish this required direct dialogue and interaction with men and women of the individual households. The activity was started in the non-Taliban provinces of Laghman and Nangarhar during the summer of 1996 – these two provinces were selected as they were considered comparatively more liberal than the rest of East and South Afghanistan. Even so, targeting women and children as main beneficiaries of health education posed a major problem within the Afghan social and cultural context, where women's mobility is quite restricted and *purdah* norms widely observed. The solution to the problem was reached by recruiting local, closely related teams of one male and one female for whom it would be culturally acceptable to move around together in areas already familiar to them.

In East Afghanistan, the health education programme started shortly before the Taliban took over Laghman and Nangarhar, and, with a brief interruption, the Taliban granted permission to continue health education. In most locations, Taliban authorities were willing verbally to permit health education (as women in general were permitted to work in the health sector), but nobody was ready to write a specific permission to this effect. However, the health education programme continued without encountering any problems and had reached more than three and a half million people by the end of 2001.

Database and national policies

During the years of conflict where the central state gradually lost its ability to provide any services to its citizens, many NGOs undertook functions which normally would have belonged under line ministries in government. This development was apparent within the health and education sector as well as within rural water supply, where DACAAR was the largest actor. In recognition of this situation, DACAAR decided to take up some of the

responsibilities following this unique situation. Hence, from 1996 onwards, DACAAR collected data on the position of all DACAAR wells using GPS technology, so that maps and associated data could be made available to local authorities. The Water Supply Programe also began working on compilation and preservation of existing groundwater surveys for Afghanistan. Many of the Afghan water supply maps and data had survived from the pre-war era but were being lost or destroyed. DACAAR was collecting all the data that could be salvaged and preserved this valuable information resource. In 1998, DACAAR established a computerised database for DACAAR hand pumps and wells in order to allow coverage with safe water to be more systematic, and to facilitate better planning by DACAAR and other agencies. The intention was to be able to hand over this information to the responsible national authorities at some point in the future.

The Afridev hand pump



Photo: DACAAR archive

In February 1998, a strategic review of the UNICEF Water and Environmental Sanitation (WES) Programme in Afghanistan provided a clear endorsement of DACAAR's strategy in water supply both in terms of its maintenance system as well as its choice of hand pump technologies. A number of WES strategies were agreed with UNICEF and they became the standard for the safe water sector at the national level. To assist in establishing WES sectoral guidelines, UNICEF and DACAAR established a Technical Working Group involving DACAAR, WHO and SCA (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan) to work on the standardisation of WES technology such as hand pumps, well aprons, latrines and WES strategies including a national hand pump maintenance strategy. One of the results of the inter-agency coordination was the publishing of 'The Community Hand Pump Water Supply and Sanitation Guide for Afghanistan' in 1999.

The disintegration of the Afghan state thus provided for the development of a community-owned and managed rural water supply strategy, developed by NGOs and through cross-agency cooperation consolidated into a national strategy for a future government to take over.

Pilot projects in agricultural engineering

Over the past 14 years, DACAAR has developed from an organisation dealing primarily with relief programmes focused on refugees in Pakistan into a development agency addressing the needs of Afghans living within Afghanistan in a volatile political scenario. As part of this process of moving towards long-term development, DACAAR in 1996 set up the Integrated Agricultural Engineering (IAE) programme that was based upon a participatory community-based approach combining processes of

agricultural production and irrigation improvement. As part of this new approach in 1997, DACAAR completed a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in two project areas in eastern Afghanistan. One in Deh Hamza in Ghazni Province west of Kabul and the other in Alingar District Laghman Province. The project area selected in Laghman was Salab Sufla, a cluster of four villages nestled between the mountains at the narrow top end of one of the many sub-watersheds in the Kachori valley.

In 1998, as a result of the PRA and extensive dialogue between DACAAR staff and the four village organisations, DACAAR and the villagers began to implement a multifaceted plan to improve the irrigation systems. Other correlated activities such as seed multiplication and on-farm trials, fruit tree production, forestation and erosion prevention projects on the surrounding hillsides were also implemented in 1998. Concurrently with these activities, the DACAAR local health educator and social organiser began a long-term health education programme in the villages, and DACAAR's Water Supply Section has also improved nine wells in these four villages.

The ongoing warfare between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance created problems in the pilot area in Khwaja Omari district of Ghazni, as that has an ethnically mixed population and bordered to the Hazara-dominated areas under the control of Hezb-i Wahdat, the Taliban's erstwhile enemy. The authorities in Ghazni during the summer of 1997 blocked all supply routes towards the Hazara areas, and not even a kilo of salt was allowed through. Apart from this policy being reprehensible in general it also effectively blocked DACAAR's work in the pilot project even though it was located within the Taliban controlled area.

Community organisation

In essence, the central foundation for the whole IAD (Integrated Agricultural Development) process was the development of a dialogue and mutual trust between DACAAR field staff and the villagers themselves. This necessitated the development of a forum, where DACAAR staff with their expertise and advice on the one side, and the villagers with their needs and own knowledge on the other, could find a common ground from which to work.

Meeting with a shura, Afghanistan, 2003



Photo: DACAAR archive

Erosion and soil depletion were major problems facing many of the villages in IAD (Integrated Agriculture Development) project areas. According to FAO, 80 per cent of all pasture areas and 60 per cent of all farming land in Afghanistan was/is seriously degraded. Soil and moisture conservation involved discussions with the community to select areas for soil erosion control or for forestry and range management.

Demonstration/observation plots were established, check dams constructed, eyebrow terraces established and trees planted. At the beginning of IAD projects, communities afforded less priority to soil and moisture conservation. In Khwaja Omari, DACAAR ran test projects to prevent erosion and after two years the villagers were impressed by the results.

Afghanistan, October 1997



Photo: Geert Pedersen

In the areas where DACAAR had been working there were no flash floods during 1999, whereas flash floods in other sections of the same project area, where no preventive measures had been taken, caused significant damage in the same period. As a result, in Khwaja Omari, reluctance and disbelief as to the effect of check dams were replaced with praise and enthusiasm as community members witnessed the impact in terms of moisture and soil conservation. Communities remarked that there was no moisture loss from the mini-watershed and they also claimed that *karez* (traditional Afghan irrigation system) water had increased.

When DACAAR staff and a Danida pre-appraisal team met with villagers in Deh Hamza and Barikot villages in Ghazni in September 1999, the elders explained to the evaluators that, 'Our irrigation water has increased by 50 per cent.' The villagers were adamant about their observation and added that the lead-time for water to reach fields had decreased and that discharge from canals had increased.

Monitoring activities

A Technical Monitoring Unit had from the early days assessed the quality of projects from a technical and administrative perspective. In 1996, an Impact Monitoring Unit was also established. The unit had the responsibility of providing DACAAR's management with timely quantitative and qualitative data and analysis of the human impact of DACAAR's relief and development projects. In connection with the Participatory Rural Appraisals carried out in the IAD pilot areas, the Impact Monitoring Unit assisted in bringing out the final reports, which has served as important baseline documentation for the projects – as well as constituting village cases studies during a period where very little such work was performed. The increased attention to documentation even went as far as having the PRA process in Deh Hamza filmed for internal use. Furthermore, a short film entitled 'The Men in Deh Hamza' was produced by a young film anthropologist, which was no mean feat in view of the Taliban ban of pictures of living beings. That this project could be carried out testifies to the exceptional level of goodwill which the DACAAR staff enjoyed in Ghazni province.

Effects of Taliban on DACAAR programmes

The Taliban's political and military successes meant that from September 1996, when Kunar, Nangarhar, Laghman and Kabul were taken over, all DACAAR's activities fell within Taliban controlled areas. The consequences of this development were initially positive as well as negative as regards DACAAR project implementation.

Improved security

On the positive side, there was markedly improved security in most areas under Taliban control compared to the previous *mujahedin* (fighters in holy war) era. Practically this meant that banditry and fighting activities virtually came to a halt, it was safe to move around throughout Taliban area and hijacking of vehicles was drastically reduced. As an example, it should be mentioned that during 1991–96 DACAAR had seven vehicles hijacked in Eastern Afghanistan (non-Taliban areas) – while from 1994–97 only one vehicle was stolen in Taliban areas, and that was recovered within a couple of hours.

Burqas for sale in a shop in Herat, 2005



Photo: Alexandra Brand Holm

In addition to the improved security situation, most check post between districts and provinces were abandoned and no 'taxes', authorised or unauthorised, were collected along the major trade routes. This was a frequent feature during the *mujahedin* period, which on top of the general security problems hampered the exchange of commodities between regions.

These improvements in material and personal security in areas under Taliban control were unanimously appreciated by the local population as well as by the NGOs and UN agencies working there. For DACAAR, project implementation was facilitated in the sense that transport of personnel, equipment and supplies was unhindered and largely non-risky. Certain areas, which earlier for security reasons were inaccessible, now became accessible for project implementation.

Effect of gender policy

On the negative side was first and foremost the Taliban policy on gender, i.e. the denial of women's right to work outside their home and the denial of girls' right to education. This was the Taliban policy issue which most directly influenced project implementation.

For DACAAR the Taliban position on gender had the following consequences: a) closure of girls' schools; b) difficulties in obtaining written permission to conduct health education by female district level health educators; c) difficulties in supervising female health educators at district level; and d) difficulties in obtaining permission to field female impact monitors.

Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm



A young Afghan man showing his portrait from the time of Taliban rule, 2005

The above points should be understood within the general Afghan context of a religiously very conservative and partly tribal Muslim society, where all perceived challenges to the existing social order, not least regarding gender, were interpreted as threats to family honour and religion. This meant that any programme targeting women specifically over the last many years had suffered under numerous restrictions and setbacks. Hence, the Taliban presence had in a number of respects just added to existing difficulties in targeting women as beneficiaries.

Besides the gender issue, the overall picture gradually changed during summer 1997 with the Taliban increasingly harassing people through mass arrests, reflecting their preoccupation with 'public moral' issues such as women's adherence to the strictest of *purdah* norms, and adoption of non-fashionable haircuts and un-trimmed beards. Furthermore, the targeting of specific groups of the population such as Panjshiris and Hazaras, perceived as the Taliban Number One Enemies, increased. Several NGOs including DACAAR had staff arrested, and in certain regions such as Ghazni the Taliban authorities imposed additional restrictions on agencies' work – disregarding existing agreements and actively hindering work outside Taliban-controlled areas.

Notes

1 DACAAR's programme interventions were based upon respect for Afghan culture and conforming with universal human rights, and the following considerations during implementation: (1) transparency and accountability; (2) acknowledgement of domestic human and material resources when initiating, designing, formulating and implementing programmes and projects; (3) that the provision of assistance does not create nor perpetuate structural discriminations by gender, tribe, ethnicity, language or political affiliation; (4) through programme implementation the agency must promote the understanding of, and respect for, human rights principles (ref. Danida Guidelines for NGO assistance)

Chapter 7

1998-2001: New Strategies



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

From Relief to Development

Kerry Jane Wilson

Around 1997, and in response to the decrease in lawlessness as the Taliban took over the majority of the country, DACAAR started considering how to shift the focus of programme activities from relief to development. In other words, focusing on the sustainability of programme interventions. In doing so, DACAAR was ahead of many agencies, the exceptions being a few agencies working in Afghanistan.

This shift in focus had little effect on the Water Supply and Building Programme methodologies since these were, by then, already participatory to the degree possible given the short term nature of their interventions. The major effect was on the other two programmes - agriculture and engineering. As a first step these two programmes were amalgamated to make the Agricultural Engineering Programme (AEP), the name reflecting the difficulties faced in persuading agronomists and engineers to work together even more so than persuading them to surrender the lead role in their projects to communities.

The Agricultural Engineering Programme established pilot project areas using Danida funding. The programme name was soon changed to Integrated Agricultural Development (IAD) - the dropping of any mention of engineering being an indicator of progress in shifting staff attitudes. The IAD programme was described in project proposals and reports as a community development programme but it was obvious to those of us who were working in it that it was still a long way from deserving any such

description. The main obstacle was still staff attitudes, expressed in sentences such as: 'We can't have discussions with the whole village – the people will argue and disagree with each other and we will never get anything done' or 'we can't let the farmers select the date for farmer field days – farmers aren't technologists'.

Mohammad Aqa, DACAAR, Kabul, 2005



Endless workshops, shelves of guidelines, the establishment of a new staff training unit (DACAAR's first staff training unit since the Water Supply training unit had been closed down) and the support of key 'change agents' (notably Mohammad Arif and Mohammad Aqa) amongst the staff eventually achieved the first successes. After that, very quickly the staff became proud of their 'community development' and could be heard expounding the benefits of 'participation' to visiting agencies. In effect, the achievement of a relatively minor degree of community participation was regarded as nothing short of miraculous by donor agencies given the circumstances under which it was achieved, a circumstance which made raising donor funding relatively easy. In fact, the level of participation, taken on a global NGO scale was relatively superficial – a good beginning would be a fair description of what was achieved up to September 2001.

Putting a thumb mark on an agreement – an often used method for signing a paper. Afghanistan, June 2003



The Water Supply Programme continued to follow the methodology established earlier by Asger Christensen. The extent of community participation was fully adequate for the size of the intervention and resulted in a level of hand pump maintenance, managed by the communities themselves, which is seldom achieved in any country of the world. The Water Supply Programme itself was improved by some attention to management details such as: regular meetings with site engineers; the establishment of field offices so that engineers did not have to return to Peshawar every month to manage their accounts; regular workshops resulting in the development of operational guidelines; and so on. Hygiene education activities, which always included women, were possible about 50 per cent of the time – as often as the Taliban gave permission for activities to start, some commander, local Talib or any other bearded youth with a Kalashnikov, stopped activities again. Surprisingly enough, quite a lot of hygiene education was actually achieved.

The Building Programme continued building schools wherever local authorities would promise to use the schools for girls. This strategy was not



Photo: Asger Christensen

Inauguration of a school in Chaparhar, Nangarhar, 1993

universally successful because once the school was built there was little to be done if the authorities then filled the school with boys. This happened with depressing regularity and although we never stopped negotiating and demonstrating serious displeasure, the results were not encouraging. The Building Programme regularly visited all schools constructed by DACAAR in order to ensure that they were actually being used as schools. Around five per cent of schools were, unfortunately, found to be being used as offices or military camps and the unfortunate Engineer Humayun would have to spend days and weeks negotiating, insisting, and pleading in order to shift the illegal occupants. In the end he was only partially successful, but at least he kept the percentage down.

Taliban

Fortunately for DACAAR, the grotesque, if not to say comic, aspects of the Taliban were often more evident than their single-minded brutality and repression. We became used, for example, to being surrounded by a veritable forest of beards – inconvenient as it was it was also a source of amusement. We laughed when staff travelling home for leave sometimes did not re-appear for weeks having been arrested for shortage of facial hair. It was not that we did not recognise the tragedy being enacted in Afghanistan – it was our way of fighting back.

Many were the times that DACAAR vehicles were stopped, particularly when a foreigner was in the vehicle, and long and ludicrous arguments ensued about where the foreigner should be sitting or some such infringement of the ever-changing Taliban regulations. It was often unnerving however, if not to say frightening, since the gun-toting Talibs manning check points frequently seemed dangerously unstable.

The real circus started whenever we tried transporting Afghan women from one place to another within Afghanistan. The arrangements could start weeks in advance with obtaining clearances from every authority imaginable for each area that the vehicle would pass through. Then there was the problem of where she would spend the night – more permissions. Then there was the question of who would be in the vehicle with her, whom could she speak to when she reached her destination and so on. It was surely a living nightmare and the worst part of it was suffered by those brave ladies who actually did it – actually travelled in Afghanistan.

It is hard to describe how difficult it was to put women in the field. Field managers who wanted to meet with their female field staff would usually have to go all the way to Peshawar since it was generally inadvisable for

both parties to meet in the same room within Afghanistan. No female staff could so much as step across the threshold of any DACAAR field office inside Afghanistan during all of the years of the Taliban rule.

DACAAR staff were often deeply resentful of the many restrictions imposed by the Taliban, but there was little that could be done in terms of rebellion. The exception was, of course, the drivers who insisted on taking music cassettes into Afghanistan particularly if there was a foreigner in the vehicle to provide some level of protection. Drivers, and Gul Rahman has to be given first prize for skill at playing this game, would play loud music in contravention of any number of Taliban edicts. A good memory of the location of check posts, fast reactions and a sharp eye for Talibs meant that the music could be switched off before reaching a check post. This was a small rebellion which most staff much enjoyed. In the end, however, after a particularly unstable Talib pulled open the door of the vehicle and searched high and low for tapes whilst screaming dire threats as to what he would do if he found any, it was obvious that this childish game would have to stop. The tapes had been hastily given to the foreigner who only had time



Photo: Jan Kjær

to sit on them before the door was wrenched open. The punishment for having tapes, never mind playing them, could be severe indeed.

To regard the Taliban as a joke was only a defence against the reality of the Taliban – a reality which was brought home to us all too often. There was the time for example, after September 2001 when we were interviewing women in Jalalabad for jobs as hygiene educators. Many women were eager to be employed, and for their interviews they had to take off their burkhas and answer questions put to them by the male hygiene education coordinator. While we were as sympathetic and encouraging as we could

be, these unfortunate women were so deeply traumatised by having face to face contact with people – men – other than their families that they could barely speak. Many of them apologised and were visibly ashamed of their nervousness, they explained, over and over again, that they had not spoken to men other than members of their families, sometimes for years. Over and over we heard the same story – they had been forced to leave school, they had been sitting at home, afraid to go out, sometimes for years.

However, the fall of Taliban inspired a hope in us all, that we were going towards better times, and that it would ease the task of moving from relief to development.

Field trip to Ghazni, March 2004



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm



Band-e-Sultan dam. From 2000-02, the surface and flood gates were repaired by DACAAR cooperating with local dam authorities in Ghazni

A mud house in Herat



Chapter 8

2002-2005: DACAAR 20 Years On



Working in a New Afghanistan

Gorm Pedersen

During its 20 years of existence, DACAAR has been through several phases with regard to activities and organisation, always reflecting the need of the target population at any given time and the development of the socio-political environment in which the activities have been carried out. DACAAR has been part of the development in Afghanistan and at the same time has reflected the country's growth. The chapters in this book tell the story of DACAAR from this perspective.

One important milestone in the development was when, following the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation forces from Afghanistan in 1989, it became possible to start cross-border activities in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan. Until then the focus had been entirely on support to Afghan refugees in Pakistan; now it became possible to start working on the economic basis in Afghanistan for the return of refugees. During the 1990s, this work developed at a steady pace, supporting the growing number of refugees that returned to Afghanistan, while at the same time adjusting to the political circumstances, first under the rule of the *mujahedin* (fighters in holy war), who took over when the Communist government in Kabul fell in 1992, and later under the Taliban. Projects were carried out in Afghanistan and the presence of DACAAR became increasingly visible through the establishment of a number of field offices around the country. The main office, however, remained in Peshawar in Pakistan, since the political environment in Afghanistan was not yet considered conducive to moving headquarters to Kabul.



Kabul, 2005

Following the fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001, and the formation of a new government in Kabul, things started to change in the country. The new government revived line ministries that gradually assumed control and placed themselves in the driver's seat with regard to the various sector development activities. Capacity was limited, but intentions were clear. At the same time, international security forces moved in and patrolled the streets of Kabul, while US-led coalition forces took on the remnants of Taliban and al-Qaeda particularly in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

This was clearly a call for the Peshawar-based aid agencies to reconsider the situation. It was not only a question of the possibility but also the necessity of having a main office in Kabul. With the new government in power, Kabul became the place were decisions were taken and where policies, guidelines, and directions were developed and enforced. Furthermore, the UN quickly expanded its presence in the country and assumed a major role in setting the development agenda and supporting the government in coordinating the planning of the endeavour. Peshawar, which had previously been the centre for most of the Afghan political groupings in exile and for the vast majority of aid agencies working in Afghanistan, was gradually sidelined in the process. Meetings were frequently called for in Kabul and often with just a day's notice. In the beginning, this was accommodated by having senior management staff more or less permanently travelling back and forth between Peshawar and Kabul, but it soon became evident that more sustainable solutions were needed. During 2002, therefore, one organisation after the other decided to move their main offices from Peshawar to Kabul. In November 2002, DACAAR followed suit.

DACAAR's main office, Kabul, 2005



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

From Peshawar to Kabul

Moving to Kabul, setting up the main office, and starting operating the programme from within Afghanistan was a major change for DACAAR. Having overcome the logistical nightmare of the move itself, it was quickly realised, however, that the real challenge ahead was not adjusting to the new location and surviving the first winter in Kabul; the real challenge was the obvious need for DACAAR to adjust itself to the new political realities in Afghanistan and the new development environment.

Working in a new environment

During the 1990s, little was in place in Afghanistan in terms of a central government with technical capacity to actually govern the development effort, particularly outside of Kabul. As a consequence, NGOs operated fairly independently of the central government, and relied mainly on agreements made locally with traditional councils (*jirga* or *shura*) and local power holders in the areas of operation. The interventions of the NGOs and the operational mechanisms were designed for optimal results under these particular circumstances. It was also obvious that this type of operation could be carried out only by NGOs and not by, for instance, UN agencies that would generally have to operate through government structures. Coordination did take place among the NGOs, for instance through ACBAR (Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief), but most of the NGOs were in effect independent actors.

Hamid Karzai, Kabul, March 2004



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

In the post-Taliban era, government ministries, supported by the UN, gradually took over coordination of development activities in the respective sectors. For DACAAR, the relevant ministry became Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), which was in charge of rural drinking water supply as well as rural development in general – the two sectors in which DACAAR was involved. Initially, DACAAR carried on with its normal programme activities within an overall long-term framework and directly funded by a few key donors. Soon, however, specific sector-wise government programmes were introduced and the government appealed to NGOs and the private sector to become implementing partners in these programmes. This was a clear sign of a strengthening government wanting to regain control over development of the country. In support of that move, and emphasising the degree to which Afghanistan was seen as a political project combating international terrorism, many of the major donors decided to change their funding policy and give the money directly to government programmes rather than to NGOs.

New funding policies

DACAAR signed up as facilitating partner to the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a World Bank-funded grant based rural development programme under MRRD. The programme started mid-2003 and has now moved on to its second year. By the end of 2004, most of DACAAR's rural development activities were carried out through NSP. Within drinking water and sanitation, it was noted with satisfaction that the government embraced DACAAR's rural water and sanitation strategy as the national strategy. However, funds for this sector came through the government in a more sporadic manner, and linked to short-term and commercial-type contracts for implementation of specific services in specific areas. While this

Photo: Gorm Pedersen



DACAAR meeting with a shura, Afghanistan, May 2003

may be seen as a way for the government to control development in the country, it was a challenge to the implementing partner NGOs. With a number of short-term contracts rather than long-term funding, NGOs risk losing the basis for long-term planning and thereby long-term commitment to beneficiary communities. NGOs will, for the same reason, not be able to keep staff for long periods of time, which in turn affects capacity building and training in specialised fields such as community participation and quality control.

It could be argued that this would not matter if the capacity lost with the NGOs would be gained in the private sector. Many NGOs, including DACAAR, give high priority to development of the private sector and see private businesses and civil society as future carriers of much of the development needed in the country. The problem is, however, that with the rapid change in funding policies, NGOs are losing capacity faster than the private sector can take over and build up. The consequence is a loss in overall national implementation capacity in some sectors, particularly within community development programmes where participatory processes are vital for the achievement of sustainable results.

Photo: Gorm Pedersen



Visiting a project site in Ghazni, 1999

Realising these problems, DACAAR wishes in the future to focus more on capacity building with civil society organisations, private sector, and government, including the provincial and district level government structures, where the needs are so obviously the greatest. This will take the form of cooperation and partnership as well as training and information sharing workshops.

Though DACAAR has established a fruitful cooperation with relevant parts of the government, it is of concern that many government officials still do not recognise NGOs as legitimate partners in development.

NGOs are often accused by government officials of misusing donor funds and not adhering to government regulations. While this may be true for some NGOs, it is felt that the accusations to a large extent spring from lack of knowledge of what NGOs really are and how they operate. It is therefore important to disseminate more information about NGOs and their work and to create space for a broad discussion of the role of NGOs and other civil society organisations in Afghanistan. DACAAR intends to contribute to that process. In this connection the role of the Afghan press should be emphasised. It is hoped that in the future the press will be able to facilitate a diversified information sharing and debate on the topic. This, of course, also requires an open-minded and obliging approach from NGOs as well as the Afghan government to bring about a fair and balanced insight into the realities of the partnership between government, NGOs, and donors.

Security

Operating in Afghanistan, security has always been high on the agenda. In the 1990s, this was addressed through firm agreements with local councils and power holders. In those days security issues mostly related to factional fighting, which could disrupt the work and endanger staff if caught in the middle, but aggressions were not targeting the NGOs. This changed after 2001, when the Taliban were ousted but not eliminated. Taliban forces re-grouped in the border areas of Pakistan and started attacking military and government targets in mainly southern and south-eastern Afghanistan. During 2003, this escalated and the Taliban declared that NGOs and other aid agencies were also legitimate targets because they were supporting the government. As the number of aid workers killed by Taliban increased, the UN and most NGOs, including DACAAR, suspended activities in the south and south-east. In spite of precautions taken, DACAAR suffered the tragic loss of four national water supply staff, who were killed in a Taliban ambush in Ghazni province in September 2003.

Hamid Karzai, Kabul, March 2004



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm



Photo: Alexandra Strand Holm

Bodyguards protecting Hamid Karzai, Kabul, March 2004

Security remains a grave concern as activities of anti-government forces keep hampering the development effort in large parts of the country and threaten the political process. The voter registration process in preparation for the presidential election in October 2004 was frequently targeted by Taliban and many election workers were killed. To the surprise of everyone, the election itself took place with very few disturbances. It remains to be seen if increased efforts of national and international security forces will make a difference in the future and ensure peaceful parliamentary elections, planned for September 2005, and a revival of development activities in the troubled south and south-east of Afghanistan.

Opium

Afghanistan has again become the world's largest supplier of opium, in 2003 supplying approximately 75 per cent of global production, and poppy production has increased in 2004 in terms of both quantities and geographical spread. The cultivated area has increased by 60 per cent, and poppy is now produced in all 34 Afghan provinces. For many farmers, growing poppy is tempting as it is a very lucrative, and until the government started eradication relatively risk free, option. Now, poppy eradication, being top priority on the government's new counter narcotics agenda, creates new demands for alternative livelihoods for farmers in the country. In line with the strategy laid out by the Afghan government,



Photo: Jesper Guhle Mogensen

The 'New Shamshatoo' refugee camp in Pakistan which was closed in August 2004

DACAAR has initiated new research projects in 2004 in cooperation with Washington State University to pursue active development of alternative livelihoods. The establishment of local farmer's associations and introducing new crops has for years been a component in DACAAR's Rural Development Programme, and by expanding these activities DACAAR aims at supporting the government strategy and at the same time the livelihoods of rural farmers.

Phasing out in Pakistan

In spite of severe challenges, development in Afghanistan is gaining momentum, and DACAAR is in the process of adjusting itself to the changing environment and the new demands of the future in order to remain a qualified and reliable partner in development. At the same time, DACAAR activities in Pakistan are being phased out and will soon come to a complete halt. In March 2003, UNHCR and the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a tripartite agreement according to which repatriation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan should be completed within three years, i.e. by March 2006. After that time, official support to refugees in Pakistan will come to an end, and NGOs mandated to work for Afghan refugees will no longer be allowed to operate. This means that the two programme activities which DACAAR still maintains in Pakistan, the Sewing Project and the Water Supply Programme in refugee camps in NWFP, will come to an end and the Pakistan chapter will finally be closed.

Challenges still lay ahead in Afghanistan, were DACAAR will keep its commitment to help Afghans rebuild their country, and ease the return of the many Afghans expected to come back.



Photo: Gerrit Pedersen

Appendix

About the Authors

Klaus Ferdinand (1926–2005) was a Danish anthropologist employed by the Ethnographic Museum at the Danish National Museum in 1954 when he came to Afghanistan for the first time as a participant in a Danish research mission. He led the establishment of the Department of Ethnography at the University of Aarhus and Prehistoric Museum, Moesgaard in Denmark in 1958. At that time he started a collection of Afghan material culture, which is now probably the biggest and best documented in Europe. His great interest in trading activities among pastoral nomads took him to all parts of Afghanistan during the 1960s and 1970s. His extensive research activities are internationally recognised and have made valuable contributions to Danish nomad research. Klaus Ferdinand was a highly respected professor among the scholars at the Danish Department of Ethnography, where he inspired among others Gorm Pedersen and Asta Olesen to do extensive fieldwork in Afghanistan, who have later contributed to the development of DACAAR.

Asta Olesen is a Danish anthropologist who in 1975–76 did anthropological field work among itinerant groups in East Afghanistan. In the following years, 1977–79, she worked in the development project Reconstruction Saighanchi, which involved the reconstruction through self-help principles of the earthquake destroyed village of Saighanchi in Samangan province. In 1986, she visited Peshawar in Pakistan and carried out interviews with representatives of a number of *mujahedin* parties in preparation for her PhD on 'Islam and Politics in Afghanistan', covering the period 1880–1990. In 1992, she took up a position as Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Anthropology, Copenhagen University. From 1995–98, she was Programme Manager for the DACAAR Rehabilitation Programme in East and South Afghanistan, during which period Health Education was established as an integral part of rural water supply, which involved the deployment of female field staff for the first time. Furthermore, in 1997 the groundwork for DACAAR's new component on integrated agricultural development

was laid. After a couple of spells as Danida senior advisor on Human Rights (Nepal, Tanzania), she joined the World Bank in 2004, where she is currently Social Coordinator on the World Bank's portfolio in Afghanistan. She has recently led the work on preparing the World Bank's Country Gender Assessment on Afghanistan, 'Afghanistan. National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction – the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future'.

Inger W. Boesen is a Danish anthropologist who has undertaken research in Afghanistan and worked with Afghan refugees. She did field research on Pashtun women in Kunar during 1977–78 with funding from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities; and prepared, established, and managed the DACAAR Sewing Project for Afghan refugee women in Pakistan between 1982 and 1985. Later, she was involved in integration projects for refugees in Denmark under the Danish Refugee Council. She holds a PhD in anthropology and education, on the subject of learning and personhood in the cultural context. In 2004, she carried out a case study of local-level participation and gender participation in the rural reconstruction and development programme National Solidarity Programme (NSP) in Afghanistan with AREU (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit) in Kabul. In March–April 2005, she worked as a consultant with the National Solidarity Programme on enhancing gender participation in the programme.

Asger Christensen is a Danish anthropologist who first visited Afghanistan in 1968 as a student and then kept coming back. He did anthropological field work in Kunar together with Inger Boesen between August 1977 and October 1978, made a short walk into Kunar in April 1981 with the *mujahedin*, and spent four years in Peshawar between 1988 and 1993 as Programme Manager for the DACAAR Rehabilitation Programme. In 1997, he assisted DACAAR in developing a new strategy focusing on the two pillars of integrated agricultural and water conservation together with rural water supply. In 1996, he joined the World Bank, and between November 2002 and March 2005 worked as task manager for the National Solidarity Project, an Afghan community development programme which is currently active in more than 7,000 villages across the country, and in which DACAAR is also involved as one of the 23 facilitating partners implementing the programme.

Kerry Jane Wilson is an Australian citizen with a PhD in nutrition from London University. In 1981, she went to Bangladesh to collect data for her PhD and whilst there met up with a group of Bengali activists. In 1983, she and the Bengali activists established a local NGO. In 1996, Kerry Jane Wilson left Bangladesh looking for new challenges, the local NGO having

become one of the largest in the country. She joined Afghanaid in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, in 1996 to run their community development programme. In 1998, she joined DACAAR as Programme Manager, East, managing both the Water Supply and Rural Development Programmes. In 2004, she was promoted to chief of programmes in DACAAR.

Gorm Pedersen is a Danish anthropologist who in 1975–76 did anthropological field work among Pashtun nomads in East Afghanistan. In 1978, he worked in the development project Reconstruction Saighanchi, which involved the reconstruction through self-help principles of the earthquake-destroyed village of Saighanchi in Samangan province in northern Afghanistan. In 1986, he visited Pakistan and carried out follow-up research among nomads who had become refugees there. The research work was later published in the book *Afghan Nomads in Transition* (Thames and Hudson/Rhodos 1994). In the period 1987-1999, he worked as a development adviser and consultant in Asian countries, which included four review and appraisal visits to DACAAR in the 1990s. From 1999–2002, he worked as a coordinator at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Copenhagen, Denmark. Since June 2002, he has worked as director of DACAAR.

DACAAR Facts 2005

Founded: 1984

DACAAR consortium: Three Danish organisations are members of the consortium: Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Danish Association for International Cooperation (MS) and Danish People's Aid (DPA).

Objective: DACAAR aims to support the development of sustainable livelihoods for rural Afghans through cooperation with government institutions in Afghanistan, capacity building at community level, improving rural infrastructure and facilities such as drinking water systems, and supporting and improving community management of natural resources.

DACAAR history and activities: In 1984, DACAAR started a sewing project with women in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. Shortly after, in 1986, DACAAR expanded the programme to include water supply projects in the refugee camps.

In 1987, in the absence of any local manufacturers, DACAAR established a hand pump factory in Pakistan to produce quality hand pumps. The establishment of this factory stimulated a healthy market for hand pumps producers. The factory was finally handed over to a Pakistani water and sanitation agency in 2004.

In 1989, DACAAR started work in Afghanistan providing services such as agricultural extension and drinking water systems and improving infrastructure such as schools, roads and irrigation canals.

In 1997, DACAAR began a shift in strategic direction from relief to development. As a result, the majority of DACAAR rural development projects were concentrated in selected project areas in Afghanistan, and the level of community participation was greatly increased. In 2004, DACAAR's school construction capacity was transferred to a newly

established Danish NGO known as Danish Assistance for Afghan Rehabilitation and Technical Training (DAARTT).

DACAAR currently implements two programmes – the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and the Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP).

At least 4.5 million Afghans now benefit from more that 33,000 water points installed by DACAAR. WSP integrates hygiene education and the promotion of hygienic sanitation facilities with the provision of improved drinking water systems. Today, DACAAR plays a leading role in the national rural water and sanitation sector in Afghanistan, as well as technology development and quality control.

In order to ensure high levels of participation and transparency, all RDP projects are identified and managed by village organisations (male and female) established when DACAAR initiate any new activities. In addition to the commitment to participation by communities, the RDP implementation strategy is also based on a commitment to sustainable management of natural resources which, in the Afghanistan context involves a focus on technology such as dry-land farming, water harvesting and rotational grazing.

Finally, with the departure of the Taliban and the lifting of some of the more draconian gender restrictions, gender issues are now actively addressed at every level in both programmes.

In Pakistan, DACAAR continues to work with UNHCR providing most of the drinking water to the Afghan refugee camps. In addition more than 2,000 women living in these refugee camps continue to make a living through the DACAAR Sewing Centre.

Geography: DACAAR activities cover 22 of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan, and refugee camps in NWFP (North West Frontier Province), Pakistan.

Employees: DACAAR has approximately 900 Afghan employees, 15 Pakistani employees and 10–15 international development workers and consultants.

DACAAR Directors from 1984-2004

Inger Boesen, Project Manager	1984–1985
Grethe Lauritzen, Project Manager	1985–1986
Niels Christian Andersen, Director	1986–1988
Leif Fridorf, Director	1988–1990
Erik Christensen, Director	1990–1993
Kurt Ulrich Larsen, Director	1993–1996
Niels Harild, Director	1996–2000
Thomas Thomsen, Director	2000–2002
Gorm Pedersen, Director	2002–

Afghanistan Facts 2005

Geography

Location	Southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran
Geographic coordinates	33 00 N, 65 00 E
Area	total: 647,500 sq km land: 647,500 sq km water: 0 sq km
Land boundaries	total: 5,529 km
Border countries	China 76 km, Iran 936 km, Pakistan 2,430 km, Tajikistan 1,206 km, Turkmenistan 744 km, Uzbekistan 137 km
Climate	arid to semiarid; cold winters and hot summers
Terrain	mostly rugged mountains; plains in north and southwest
Elevation extremes	lowest point: Amu Darya 258 m highest point: Nowshak 7,485 m
Land use	arable land: 12.13 per cent permanent crops: 0.22 per cent other: 87.65 per cent (2001)
Irrigated land:	23,860 sq km (1998 est.)

Natural hazards	damaging earthquakes occur in Hindu Kush mountains; flooding; droughts
Environment – current issues	limited natural fresh water resources; inadequate supplies of potable water; soil degradation; overgrazing; deforestation (much of the remaining forests are being cut down for fuel and building materials); desertification; air and water pollution

People

Population	28,513,677 (July 2004 est.)	
Age structure	0–14 years:	44.7 per cent (male 6,525,929; female 6,222,497)
	15–64 years:	52.9 per cent (male 7,733,707; female 7,346,226)
	> 65 years :	2.4 per cent (male 334,427; female 350,891) (2004 est.)
Infant mortality rate	total: 165.96 deaths/1,000 live births male: 170.85 deaths/1,000 live births female: 160.82 deaths/1,000 live births (2004 est.)	
Life expectancy at birth	total population: 42.46 years male: 42.27 years female: 42.66 years (2004 est.)	
Total fertility rate	6.78 children born/woman (2004 est.)	
Ethnic groups (per cent)	Pashtun 42, Tajik 27, Hazara 9, Uzbek 9, Aimak 4, Turkmen 3, Baloch 2, other 4	
Religions (per cent)	Sunni Muslim 80, Shi'a Muslim 19, other 1	
Languages (per cent)	Pashtu (official) 35, Afghan Persian (Dari) 50, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11, 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4, much bilingualism	

Literacy (definition: age 15 and over can read and write)	total population: 36 per cent male: 51 per cent female: 21 per cent (1999 est.)

Government

Country name	conventional long form: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan conventional short form: Afghanistan local long form: Dowlat-e Eslami-ye Afghanestan local short form: Afghanestan former: Republic of Afghanistan
Government type	Islamic republic
Capital	Kabul
Administrative divisions	34 provinces (velayat); Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamian, Daykondi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Ghowr, Helmand, Herat, Jowzjan, Kabol, Kandahar, Kapisa, Khowst, Konar, Kondoz, Laghman, Lowgar, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nurestan, Oruzgan, Paktia, Paktika, Panjshir, Parvan, Samangan, Sar-e Pol, Takhar, Vardak, and Zabol
Independence	19 August 1919 (from UK control over Afghan foreign affairs)
National holiday	Independence Day, 19 August (1919)
Constitution	new constitution, 4 January 2004
Legal system	according to the new constitution, no law should be 'contrary to Islam'; the state is obliged to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, realisation of democracy, and to ensure

	national unity and equality among all ethnic groups and tribes; the state shall abide by the UN charter, international treaties, international conventions that Afghanistan signed, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Suffrage	18 years of age; universal
State structure	*chief of state:* President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Hamid KARZAI (since 7 December 2004); former King ZAHIR Shah holds the honorific, 'Father of the Nation', and presides symbolically over certain occasions, but lacks any governing authority; the honorific is not hereditary *head of government:* President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Hamid KARZAI (since 7 December 2004); note - the president is both chief of state and head of government *cabinet:* 27 ministers; note - under the new constitution, ministers are appointed by the president and approved by the National Assembly *elections:* the president and two vice presidents are elected by direct vote for a five-year term; if no candidate receives 50 per cent or more of the vote in the first round of voting, the two candidates with the most votes will participate in a second round; a president can only be elected for two terms; election last held 9 October 2004 (next to be held in 2009) *election results:*Hamid KARZAI elected president; per cent of vote: Hamid KARZAI - 55.4, Yunus QANOONI - 16.3, Mohammad MOHAQEQ - 11.6, Abdul Rashid DOSTAM 10.0, Abdul Latif PEDRAM - 1.4, Masooda JALAL - 1.2 From *CIA World Factbook*- Afghanistan 2005 [Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 18 September 2005]

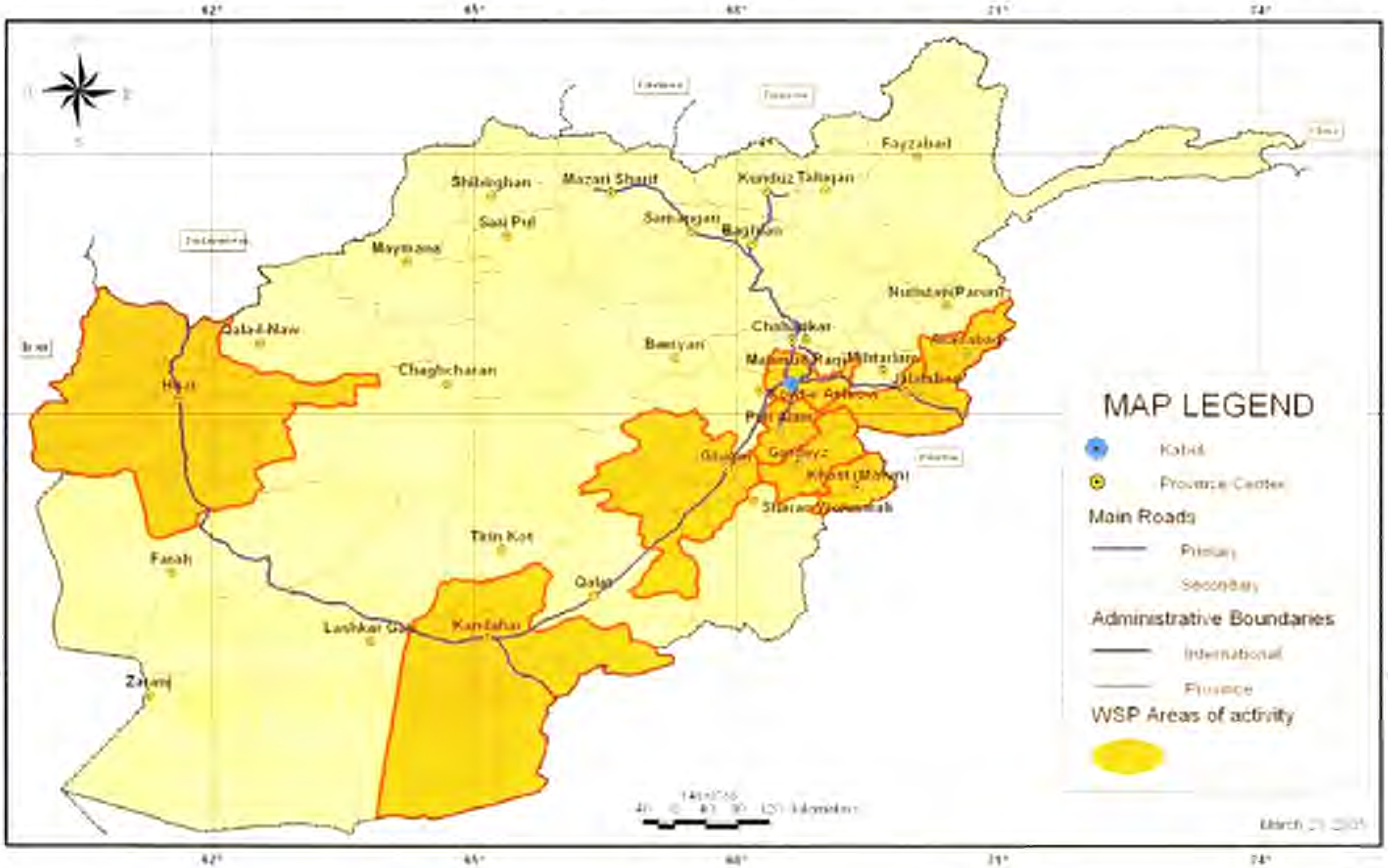
Chronology

1880-1901	Amir Abdur Rahman. Centralisation of the Afghan state through strengthening Islamic law vis-a-vis tribal and customary law, curtailing the power of tribal and religious leaders. Crushing at least 40 local uprisings.
1901-1919	Amir Habibullah. Killed in 1919. Slow steps towards modernisation. First Afghan newspaper.
1919	Third Anglo-Afghan War whereby Afghanistan regains full independence from British India dominance.
1919-29	King Amanullah. Afghanistan's first constitution and legal reforms introduced. Attempt to modernise society and culture incl. reforms in support of women's emancipation.
1929	King Amanullah exiled as a result of tribal uprising against reform policy. Civil War.
1930-33	King Nadir Shah. Installed with support of tribes and religious establishment. Assassinated in 1933.
1933-73	Zahir Shah reigns. Gradual modernisation. Maintenance of non-alignment.
1949	Election reforms result in liberal parliament.
1950	Crackdown on nascent opposition and end of liberal experiment. Sardar Daoud becomes Prime Minister in 1953. Rapprochement with the Soviet Union.

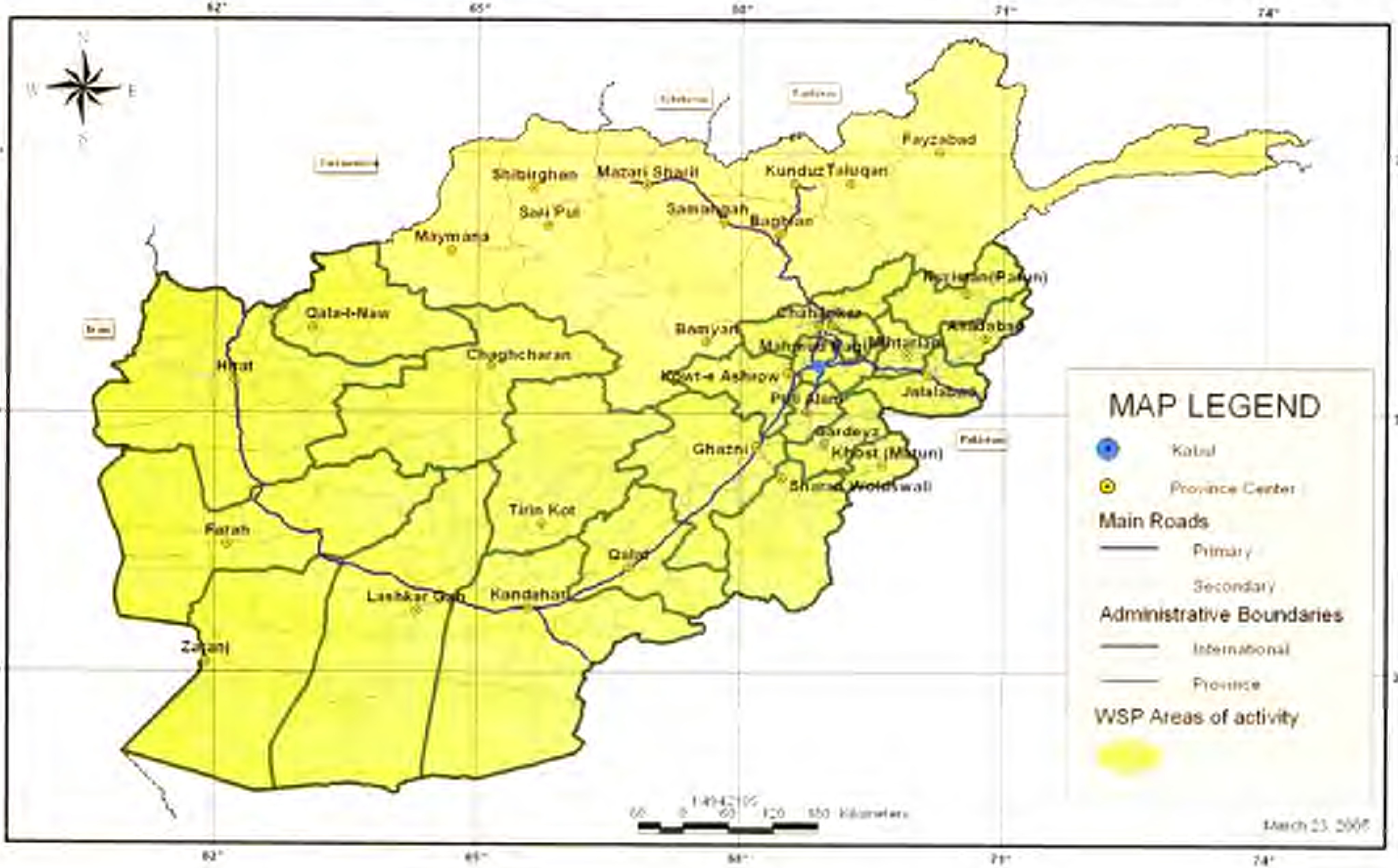
1963	Daoud forced to resign, mainly because of authoritarian style of government and strained relations with Pakistan.
1963-73	Constitution, and first nationwide election (1963). Constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy installed. Failed due to lack of enactment of the Constitution and not legalising political parties. Formation of Communist groupings and of Islamist groupings, which increasingly clash at the university campus.
1971-73	Severe drought resulting in famine mainly in Central Afghanistan. Government perceived as inactive and unable to manage the crisis.
1973	Coup d'etat by Sardar Daoud assisted by Communist group Parcham. Reform policy started, and restrictions on political opponents.
1975	Attempts of Islamic insurgency failed. Clamp down on Islamic opponents.
1977	New Constitution. Civil Code and Penal Code, based on Shari'a. Women get equal rights to institute divorce cases. Family Courts established. Clamp down on Communist opponents.
1978	Saur Revolution: Bloody coup against President Daoud by united Communist groups Khalq/Parcham (PDPA). Nur Mohammad Taraki as Prime Minister. 1977 Constitution abrogated. Decree No. 7 confirms equal rights for women, regularises dowry and marriage expenses and forbids forced marriages. Decree No. 8 introduces comprehensive but ill-founded land reform.
1979	Widespread popular insurgency, followed by brutal suppression. Infighting in the PDPA and Taraki killed and replaced by Hafizullah Amin. In December, 50,000 Soviet troops invade the country. Hafizullah Amin is killed, and Barbrak Karmal installed as President.
1989	Withdrawal of Soviet troops. Mujahedin control most of countryside, increasing number of refugees escape fighting and destruction. Over the next decade, the number of refugees reaches around six million.

1992	President Najibullah agrees to step down and mujahedin coalition takes over Kabul. In-fighting over the next couple of years leads to the destruction of Kabul and Kandahar. Decree on hijab issued restricts women's public appearance.
1994	Emergence of Taliban.
1996	Taliban conquer Kabul, Najibullah executed. Ban on women's employment, girls' schools closed, full purdah imposed on women and ban on men shaving their beards.
1998	Taliban conquer Mazar-i-Sharif, the last major city controlled by Northern Alliance.
1999	The UN imposes sanctions against Afghanistan. Drought hits the country.
2001	Third year of drought. Taliban regime falls. Signing of Bonn Agreement. Hamid Karzai chosen leader of Interim Government.
2004	New Constitution agreed by Loya Jirga 4 January. Presidential Election. Hamid Karzai elected as president.

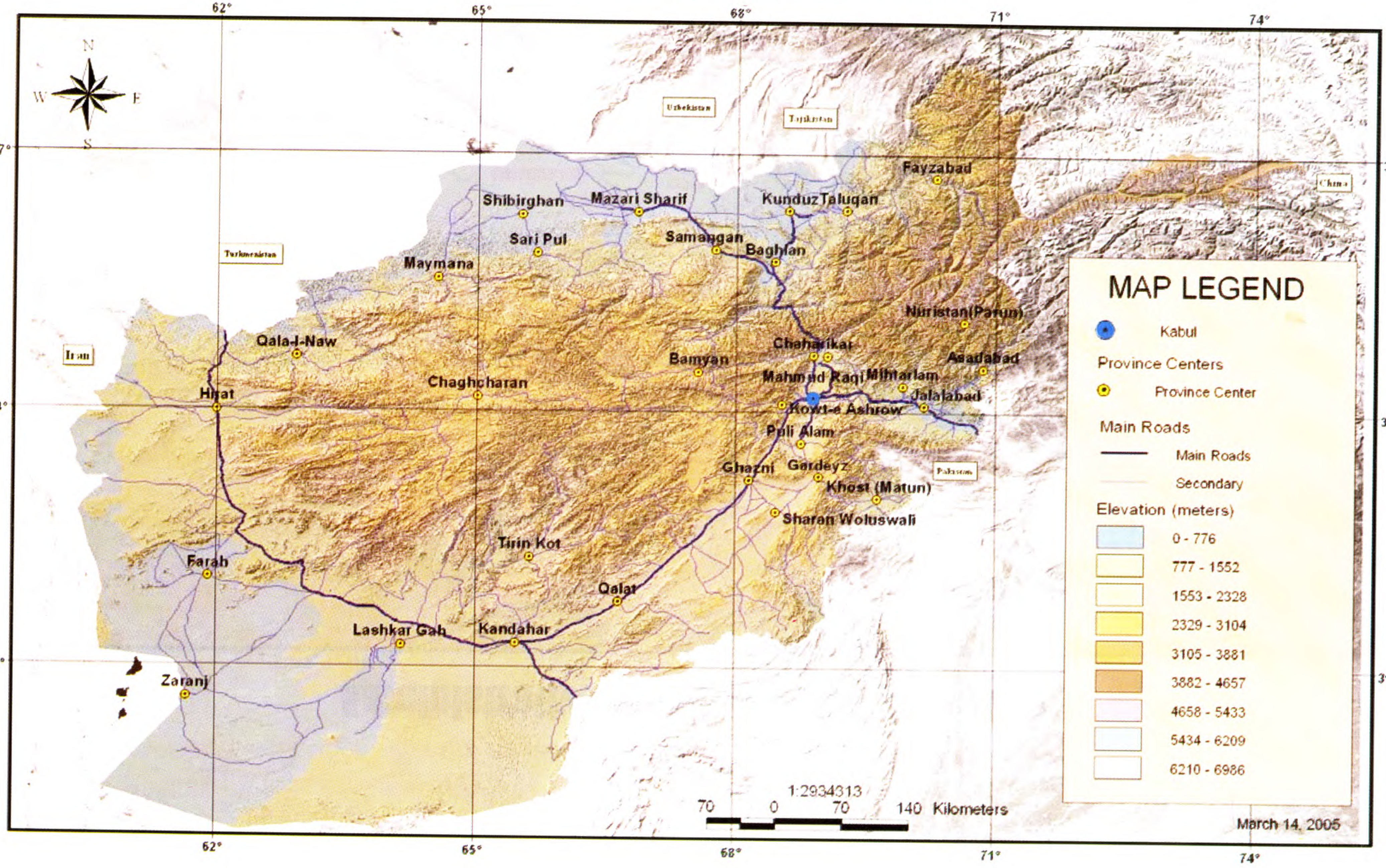
DACAAR Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) – areas of activity 1991–1994



DACAAR Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) – areas of activity 1995–2004



Elevation map of Afghanistan

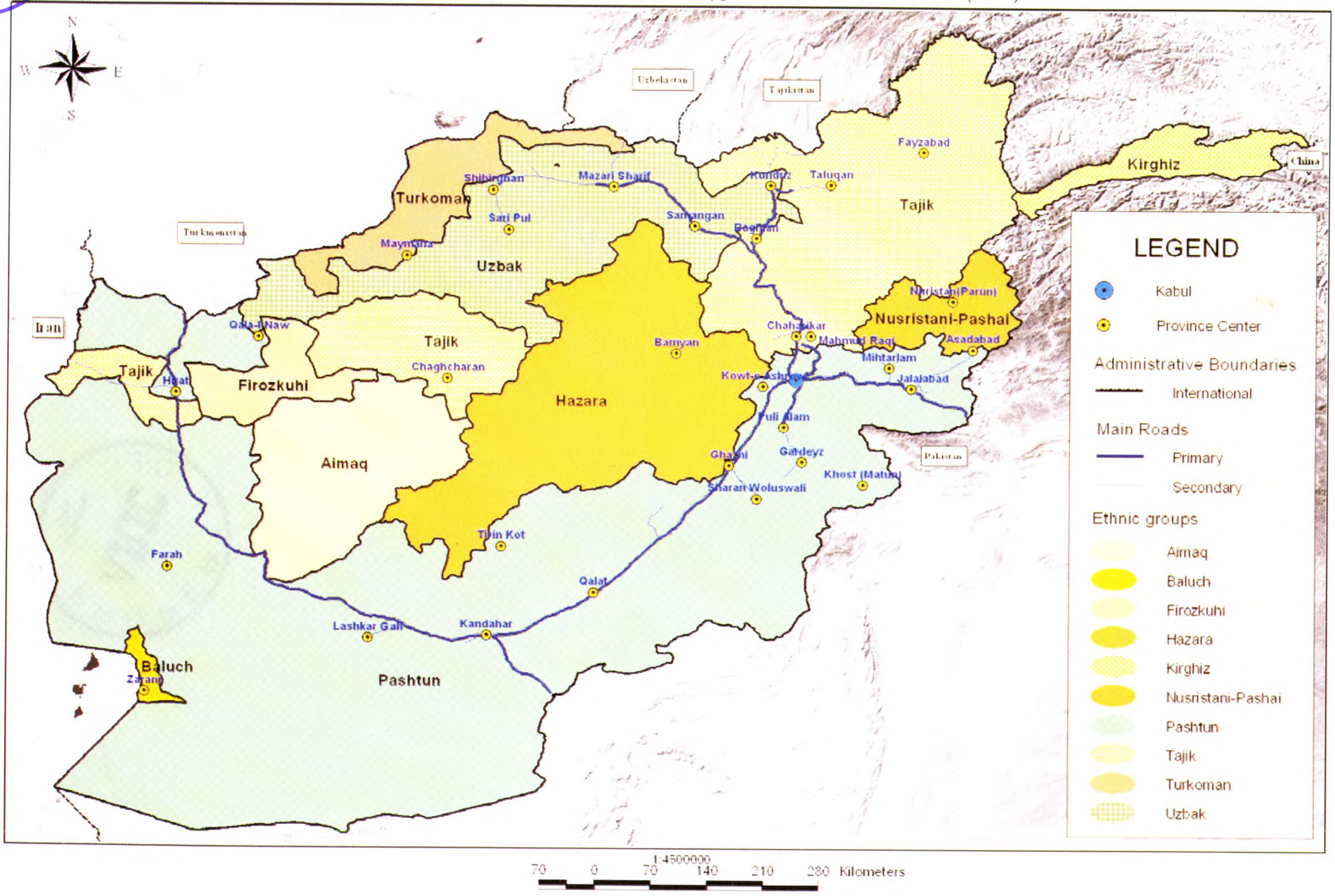


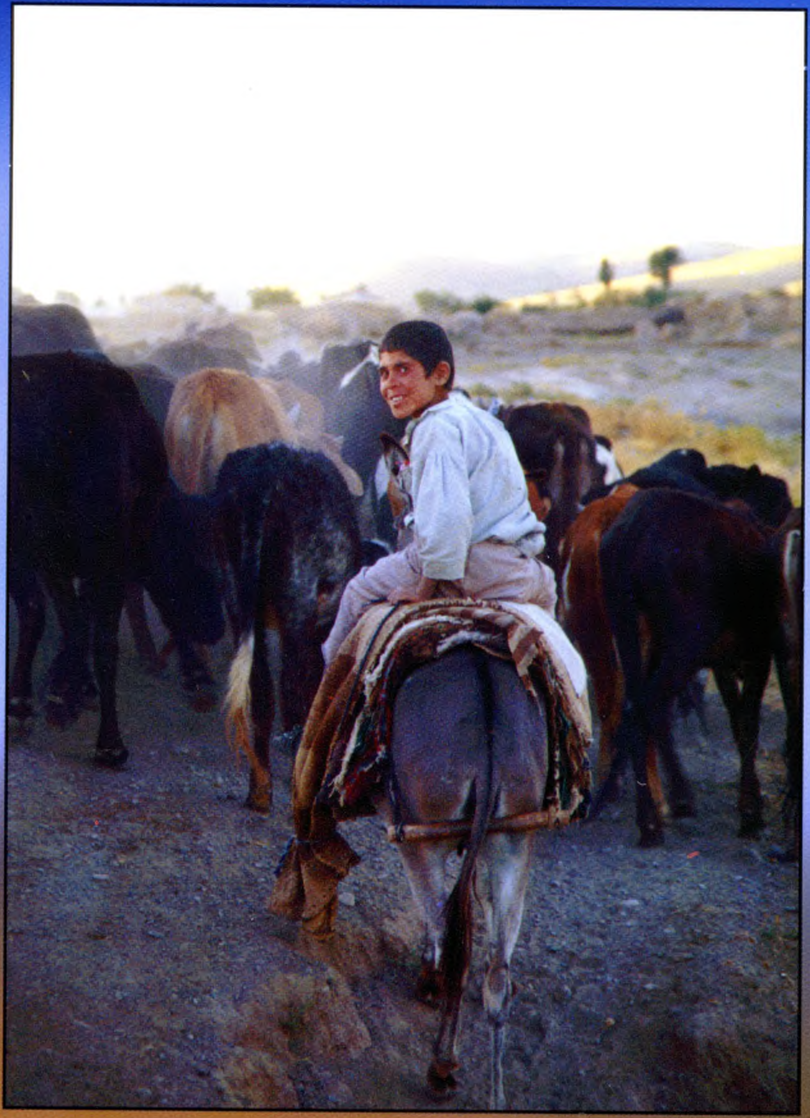
Administrative provinces of Afghanistan



Ethnic groups in Afghanistan – majority per district

Based on a map from Gorm Pedersen's *Afghan Nomads in Transition* (1994)





DACAAR: More than 20 Years in Pakistan and Afghanistan is documenting Danish aid and development carried out by DACAAR in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In 1984, DACAAR (Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees) was established as an initiative to help and support the growing number of Afghans who had fled their country during the first years of the Soviet occupation. At that time, millions of Afghans lived in refugee camps in Peshawar in neighboring Pakistan. This was when DACAAR started the initial Sewing Project, a skill-training and income-generating project for Afghan refugee women being one of the most vulnerable groups in the camps. A few years later, activities were expanded, and DACAAR started a Rehabilitation Programme inside Afghanistan. Today, more than 20 years later, DACAAR is one of the major agencies working with rural development and water supply in Afghanistan.

This book tells the story of DACAAR, and gives insight into activities from the beginning in Pakistan, and later inside Afghanistan - development activities carried out during the Soviet occupation, civil war, the time of Taliban rule, and today in a new Afghanistan struggling to move forward.

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